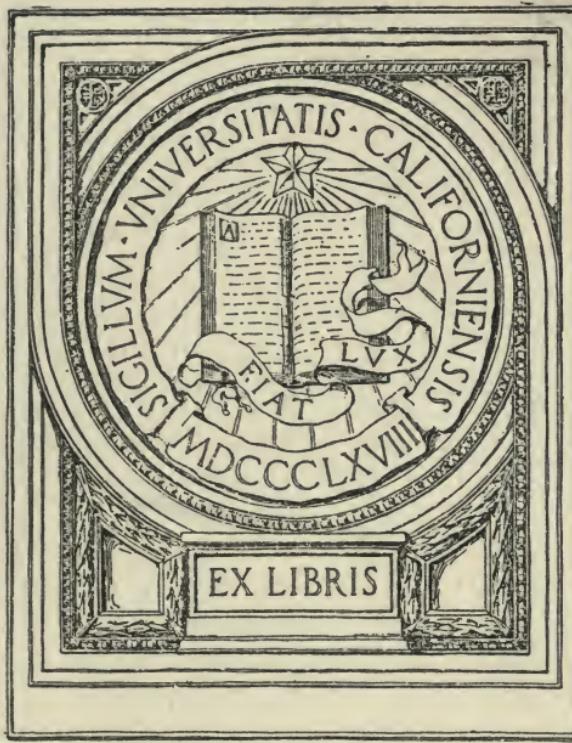


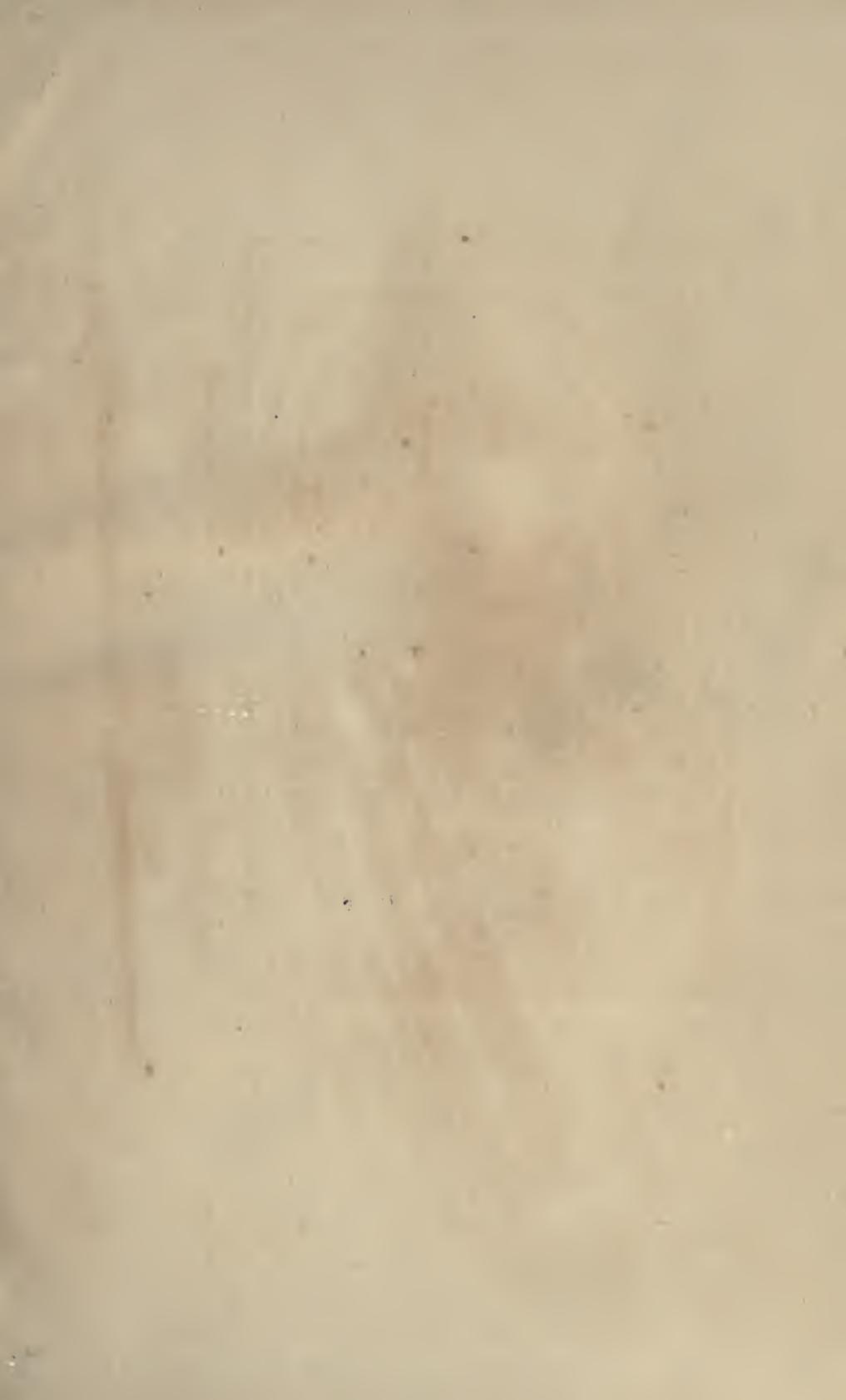


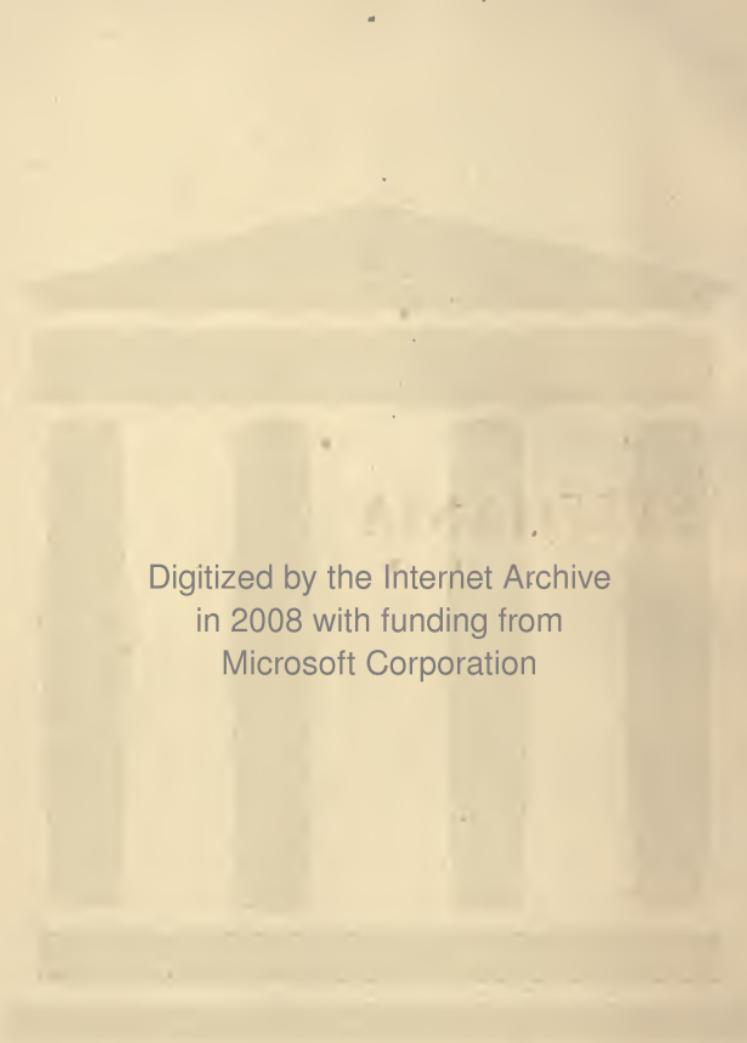
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STEPHANIA

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Stephania
a friaTogue by
Michael Field



1892

Othoind.

Cerberind.

TO MARY
MAGDALENE

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

Stephania

A Trialogue

MICHAEL FIELD

LONDON
ELKIN MATHEWS & JOHN LANE
AT THE SIGN OF THE BODLEY HEAD
IN VIGO STREET
1892
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LA MORT

Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres !

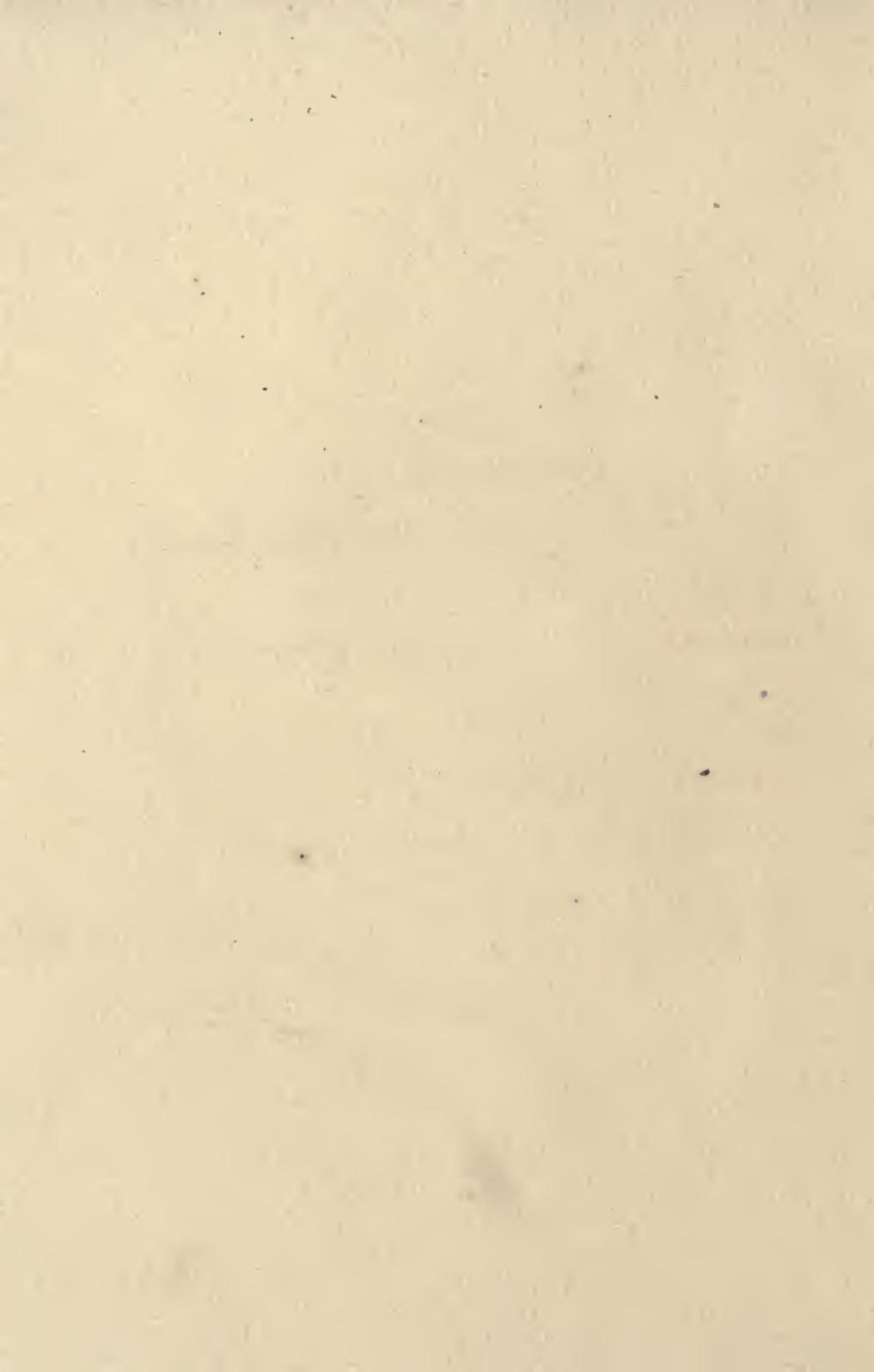
LA LUXURE

Ma colère vaut la tienne.

LA MORT

C'est moi qui te rends sérieuse ; enlaçons-nous !

FLAUBERT : La tentation de Saint Antoine



PERSONS

OTHO III	Holy Roman Emperor
GERBERT (Pope Sylvester II)	His Tutor
STEPHANIA	A Courtesan

SCENE—*Rome; the old Palace on Mount Aventine.*

TIME—*Three days in the January of A.D. 1002.*

LA MORT

Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres !

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

STEPHANIA

ACT I

LA MORT—*Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres !*

SCENE—*The hall of the old palace on the Aventine. To the left a throne; at the back a loggia, beyond which the Emperor is seen addressing the Romans.*

STEPHANIA *robed in white, with a censer in her hand, stands forth, and looks to right and left.*

Stephania The palace is prepared, but I alone
Am here as hostess to the foreign guests.
So it should be ! To the invaders who
Can offer welcome save the courtesan ?
It is her office to diffuse strange grace
About the vacant rooms, to breed the smiles
Men love on joyless faces, to provide
The strong incitements of the slave born free,
And above all to make vice sibylline.
Am I not fitted ?

(She stretches herself languorously at the foot of the throne, and clasps her censer)

Stephania

There are perfumes here
Full of the spices that grow old in tombs,
Soft, penetrative scents that shaken out
Spread poison, but are fatal being breathed
By one without suspicion as in sleep.
I shall keep close the secret : he will come,
And sit upon his throne, and write decrees,
Secure as he had many years to live,
Whom I shall yet within one narrow week
Watch dying of an infinite fatigue.
Swing forth the censer ! Would that he were come !

(She goes toward the loggia and looks out)

O sorry sight ! A Roman Emperor
Deigns to wax eloquent, and by persuasion
Has oped the city-gates : an army lies
Behind him, and the Romans listen awed,
Though they have been determined in revolt.
This time three years ago he came to quell
Another rising ; then Crescentius ruled
As Consul—ay, Crescentius, my great spouse,
So fervid in his love of Italy,
So fixed in his ambition to restore
The ancient forms of freedom to the State.
Within the Castle of Saint Angelo
He made a stout resistance. Finally
The Emperor lured him by false promises
To yield the keys, and in an hour his corpse,
Swung high from his own battlement, became

Stephania

The rebels' warning. And I faced the sign,
And, while men shrank away in terror, stood
Waiting some signal from the tardy heavens,
Some declaration of God's righteousness
And power to crush the tyrant. But the sun
Rose to his setting day by day, and made
The same sharp shadows on the roof, the same
Hand on the dial-plate : the single change
I witnessed was a wavering in the lines
Of the loved form before me, and this too
I knew was natural, and did not blench,
But tarried, waiting for the earthquake's shock
To rend the palace, for the pestilence
To creep among the foreigners, for death
To strike the German Otho unawares
While he was feasting on the Aventine.
I tarried, never praying, but with faith
Persistent in some miracle. One day
The Emperor rode past me with a troop
Of soldiers, and they pointed : 'Yonder stands
Crescentius' wife.'—'Ay, take her to the camp,'
He answered carelessly, then turned to speak
With Gerbert of Ravenna, his dear friend
And tutor, of the monkish discipline
Grown lax of late ; and I was borne away
To degradation. Passive from the first
I yielded to my ravishers, and when
They left me fell to musing my revenge.

Stephania

I was too weak at first to apprehend
The mysteries beyond the knowledge forced
Upon me, and I wandered 'mong the hills
For solitude : then slowly in my heart
There swelled the pressure of a secret joy
As in their magic fountains I beheld
My form still beautiful, and recognised
The power of retribution in myself.
Then sacred grew my agony, my shame,
Sacred my beauty, sacred the strange arts
I found myself endowed with, as the child
Of a great craftsman is endowed with skill
To handle unfamiliar instruments ;
And I divined with gratitude and awe
That while the earth went her accustomed way,
And while the sun
Twisted sharp shadows on the roofs, and while
The same hand pointed on the dial-plate,
My heart was being fitted for a deed
That should bring honour back to Italy,
Great honour back to my Crescentius' name,
And glory to my womanhood. I dwelt
Apart, I nursed my beauty to its old,
Yea, more than olden lustre, for my body
Grew bright in exultation as a shield
Fresh-burnished, and my hardihood of youth
Returned. I have vitality to spread
Consuming langours and a callousness

Stephania

To make those tremble who can suffer hurt.

(She watches the approach of OTHO and GERBERT)

The Emperor scarce looks older than the day

He passed Crescentius' gibbet; by his side

Is Gerbert, the new pontiff, the audacious

Monk, who unfrocked himself to learn in Spain

The Moors' delicious wizardry, who plants

His hopes in politics, who seeks to rouse

Kings to the rescue of the Holy Tomb.

He has, men say, great eloquence, a rich,

Persuasive tongue. *(With sudden fury)* Pope John had his
cut out!

The man my husband lifted into power

I have seen hurried through the Roman streets

Blind, mutilated, set upon an ass.

It must not be forgotten! Though in art

The method may be imperceptible

That lays arresting touches on the lips,

Then locks them fast; although these bosom-friends,

As a young, married pair, make interchange

Of counsel and of fondness, one of them

Must watch the other mute in his decay.

The twain are doomed; and I behind this column

Shall see them take possession of their fates.

(She glides out of sight as OTHO and GERBERT enter, with

Roman nobles and a German guard about them. The

Emperor throws down his shield by the column that

hides Stephania; he takes off his crowned helmet, and

Stephania

stands before his subjects, his long, fair hair spreading out in ripples round his head)

Otho (To the Romans) Now Rome is truly Rome,
she is herself

The world's wide providence. We will prevail
To turn her memories to reality,
Her hopes to consummation. O believe
The things that ye were born for from this hour
Shall find fulfilment. I embrace your past,
Breathe over it and pray : it will revive,
It must, if you are faithful, for I honour
All your traditions from the Sibyl's gift
Of counsel on her palm-leaves to the laws
Threaded by great Justinian. And the Church,
Christ's charge to His Apostle, I, His servant,
Freely and firmly in authority
Will stablish o'er men's souls. Think, Romans, think
Of all that I inherit and combine ;
Think of the fiery heart in me, and bid
My crown of knighthood triumph.

Gerbert Pass before
The Emperor, he is gracious to receive
Your forfeited allegiance, and retire !

(The Romans do homage sullenly, and pass out. At a sign from the Emperor his soldiers withdraw to the loggia)

Otho The multitude is gone, the pageantry.
Gerbert And you are lord of Rome.

Stephania

Otho Of Rome, of this
Reluctant, prostrate people. In my dream
I kindled and expressed them, I was theirs :
Gerbert, is this the end ? I travelled far,
So far for this attainment, and it lies
Dwarfed, circumscribed about me. I recoil.
To think that there should be such emptiness
When one sits down to feast !

Stephania (*Apart, stretching forth her neck eagerly*)
What is this mood ?

The conqueror's satiety ? How well
He knew his mind three years ago, and now
A wide-spread restlessness is on his face ;
He is no longer curious. I must wait,
And learn what has befall'n him.

Otho Presently,
They say, the fig-tree withered when the breath
Of holiness had cursed it.

Stephania (*Apart*) Marked, O doomed !
Who is it that hath put a brand on him,
While I was absent ? To the sacrifice
The oxen should be brought full-feeding, smooth
Of skin, not sick'ning nor incapable.

Gerbert My son, you are withholding from my love
Some intimate, sealed grief ; for I have known
Strong melancholy sweep across your soul,
A singing whirlwind—not this weariness.
What ails you ?

Stephania

Otho (Turning bitterly towards the throne) Is it not a
royal seat ?

How many things belong to me—the north,
The south, where winter is and where the sun !
I cannot now look round on anything
That is not mine. I have estranged myself
From Saxon, German—yea, my very blood—
To mingle with these Romans. Italy !
It breaks my heart but to conceive the wrath
I nurse in store for her revolted sons.
The legions I would pour out on her plains
To trample her ! I would exterminate
Whatever has proved stubborn to my love ;
And yet the armies that I summon pass
So wan before me that I know they are
Mere visions, and their martial music such
As may be heard at funerals. You harness
My soul to the impossible ; I run
Wildly across a waste that has no goal,
Spurred on by your ambition. To excite
My love of fame you urged me to the quest
Of Charlemagne's tomb ; and now you see me raised
Like him a Roman Emperor, but like him
I sway a vacant kingdom. How sublime
He sat erected on his mural throne !
The unstained hair was curling round the brows,
I think, was growing still ; but the sunk eyes
Were sealed away from me—I dared not break

Stephania

Their sepulchre ; the sombre guardian lids
Repulsed me, and I fell down, prone, diffused,
Across the open coffin into which
His feet had disappeared.

(Turning fiercely to Gerbert)

This is the Empire

That you have called me to. I brought this cross
Away from him, and hung it round my neck ;
It seems a theft and no investiture,
For all that I attempt is scorned of God.

To think how in your blindness you misguide,
How you deceive me ! For Crescentius' death. . . .

Stephania (Apart) Crescentius !

Otho I indeed have made amends
The petty way you counselled.

Gerbert (Imperiously) And the past
Is blotted out.

Otho Not so—O agony !
It is supreme. This penitence you thought
Would put away the memory of my sin
Has magnified and made it monstrous, driven
My soul to pace as sentinel before—

As common sentinel,
By day and night before Saint Angelo.

Will nothing stir me from that moment, nothing
Cut off that vision ?

Stephania (Apart) Nay, as on a gem
Memory can grave.

Stephania

Otho I have plunged deep in wars,
Have summoned councils, and at Pavia kept
The Holy Christmastide 'mid sound of bells
And chaunt of clergy, yet my guilt remains,
Increases day by day, and perfects me—
I feel it—for damnation. Oh unjust,
For one immense impatience to be damned !

(*He covers his face, sobbing : Gerbert stands silent with wonder*)

Stephania (Apart) This man is full of fears ; he thinks
he walks
Close to the brim of hell ; but I shall rise
From its mid-gulfs of mire immaculate
Who am devoted to these crimes, can bear
To front and look on them as unappalled
As martyrs by the lions' moving dens.

Gerbert You sinned in haste ; God hath put by your
sin.

Otho (Looking up passionately) While I am ruling in
Crescentius' place ?

Stephania (Apart) Watched by Crescentius' wife ?

Otho Wearing the power

Crescentius wore, and worse than all fulfilling
His rival dream ? But I am disabused.
To Romuald of Saint-Emmeran I confessed
A month ago.

Gerbert A hard, morose, old man,
Of narrow range and habit, solitary,

Stephania

And bent on bringing those to solitude
The Church requires for action.

Otho The great firs
About Ravenna—

Gerbert Did you seek his grot
As any common pilgrim ?

Otho It was noon
Before I reached his cavern in the hill,
Before I came upon the rocky ledge
Where he had propped his parchments. All my blood
Seemed flowing from me, and I heard the twang
Of the cicadas till I only thought
How many sounded forth their noise of heat,
When suddenly he saw me : in his arms
I told him of my wickedness, I prayed
That he would give me penance, and a little
I must have lost myself, for when I woke
I recollect what a disc of light
His tonsure was, and lay in apathy
Although his voice, loud through the softening beard,
Commanded me to put away my crown,
My state and every hope, if I would live,
If I were honest. The whole sunny day
I sat and listened to his prayer or silence
As if I had been ill. When evening came
He bade me dip his pitcher in the fountain
Some distance off; I took it with a smile,
And smiles came to me from his countenance

Stephania

That sped me happy. As I dipped the crock
Two eremites drew near to watch me fill,
Both curious, shrunk and hard, but one of them—
O Gerbert, one of them was young. I fled,
Nor spoke a word to Romuald as we supped,
Nor prayed as we lay down, but flung my mantle
For softness on the broken floor, and breathed
As though I had been sleeping till I slept.
All night he lay upon the stones. A touch
Woke me at last between my eyes that opened
To see the saint's mouth clinginglly withdrawn,
And record of such love about his lids
I could not bear to think of: as we kissed
I knew my mother's love was further off
Than this old man's from God. Beneath his passion
Almost I yielded . . . but the breeze was strong;
In the cold brightness ere the sun was risen
I thought of how my army to the trumpet
Replied with life; an eagle on the sky
Went past; I snatched my toga from the floor,
And then there was no colour to be seen
Throughout the earthy dwelling-place. I broke
A crust, I tried to drink beneath those brows
Planted above me, till in fear I rose
As if to go: he asked me of my choice,
But in my face he found not what he sought.
I strove, I parried, I implored, I made
Waivering conditions:—did I enter Rome

Stephania

I would return, put by the purple, take
The cowl; and Romuald bent his eyes on me,
Condemning and excluding while he yearned,
And told me I should never pass the gates
Of Rome, once entered, but should surely die
In a brief while.

And it is endless death!

How different the process that men dread,
The death that is a falling of the leaves
Earthward across the wind, a running out
Of shallow waters that have spent themselves,
A diminution and a change, whereby
Effacement is accomplished step by step,
From this most hideous destiny, so raw,
So sudden and offensive. . . .

God, O doom,

O endless years of fiery penalty!
I dare not think of what it were to live
Chained up from shaping forth my eager thoughts,
Cut from the future and my gifts to it—
Ah me, the world, the world!—condemned to go
Forth from my shining camp, and from the hopes,
The enterprise, and monuments of men,
To bare obscurity . . . that small, bleak cell,
The cenobite's restrictive lip—and yet
The sense that he is right! I left his door,
And spake no word of what had been, but swift
As in the rush of onslaught sped my army

Stephania

Across the land to Rome. Tears dashed my eyes ;
The night was just a time to give them vent,
A privacy for weeping. To resign
War, empire, politics, the subtle arts
Of learning, and fall back on ignorance. . . .

Gerbert Would be unworthy. Cæsar, I am stern
To this forsaking of your higher self,
This superstition cast across the brightness
Of your divine intelligence. Your mother
Gave you her purest Grecian blood, you are
Emperor august of Rome, more than the rival
Of Greeks and Romans by your eloquence,
Your courage: you have learning, loftiness,
Great powers of meditation ; and in you
The waiting nations of the north and south
Look for such restoration of their state
As Virgil sang when in the grave of Dis,
Filling the air with prophecy.

Otho Ah, so,
Death always ! From the kingdom of the Shades
He brake into prediction. From my lips
Start words and promises that in my heart
I know will tarry for fulfilment long,
Long after I have perished. Is it not
A sign that one is dying when one sees
The coming ages clear as in a glass ?
I am already stricken.

Stephania (Apart) We must bind

Stephania

The brows of death with roses : his distaste
Shall grow into a fatal servitude
And waiting on her pleasures with desire.

Otho I will return, I will go back to him.

Gerbert Back through the gates of Rome ? Is he a
Pope,

Can he give absolution ? You forget
That our authority protects you even
From the remorse of conscience. But how much
There is you have forgotten ! How events
Combine to sadden me, and—ah !—how wise
The wisdom of my enemies who said
My age would be embittered ! You forget—
But that I pardon ; my fidelity
Stretches for generations past your years—
How I have rescued you from greedy foes,
Guided by craft and menace your estate,
And in your childhood gathered for the rein
Of your young hand the stormy peoples pressed
Together by your grandsire's biting sword.
Your mind took then no impress ; but the day
That you became my pupil. . . .

Otho Must remain
Imperishably blest. Arithmetic !—
Gerbert, those first discourses on the order
Of numbers, on the primal covenant
God made with them, the symbols of His thought,
From which all wonders of geometry,

Stephania

And music's magic, and the course of stars
Depend—so solemnly you lessoned me
In the *quadrivium*, I have made essay
Of every art and power in relevance
To a determined harmony. You came
To me a moody, dreaming child, presented
The *abacus* to handle, gave me knowledge,
Taught me no chronicle, but played about
The past, as summer lightning. You abhorred
At my wild prayer my Saxon rudeness, rescued
The Greek within me from rusticity,
From northern clouds.

Gerbert Which hover and will fall,
Most glorious Otho, on your mind, once more
Dimming its fair distinction, if you give
Your German nature range—those qualities
You prayed me to abhor in you, which I
Abhor. With Gallic transport I perceived
The Grecian gifts you called me to confirm,
To part from promptings of romance, vague scruples,
Contrition, and disquiet. An hour ago
Your voice flowed on in oratory expressing
The light that had been with you in your wars,
That makes your empire prevalent, yourself
The wonder of the world. But you are lost,
Found as a fool incapable of faith,
Incapable of gratitude.

Otho Beloved,

Stephania

Is it so little to create one's friend
The head of Christendom, to find a man
Loving like you the past, loving the science
And mystery of things?

Gerbert Who fled the cloister,
And at Cordova in the schools became
The pupil of the Saracens. O wondrous
The liberation! As the gift of fire
To men, the gift of science to the Church.
If you esteemed her, if the Papacy
Were veritable empire, what He judged
Who said *I am a King*, and gave the keys
Into S. Peter's charge, we could begin
So much together. Inexpressible
What glory, what divineness could be shown!
And you put by the opportunity,
And leave the world to ignorance and shame,
Whom I with so much pains taught to ascend
The shadowed realms of wisdom.

Otho (Abstractedly) I would give
My treasure, my blue-starred dalmatica
To show him that I am not covetous,
That I am willing to enrich the new,
Fair churches that they build who still have hope.
If he might be persuaded

Gerbert (With rising, but controlled, passion)
Then your aim
In visiting the shrines, burdening the troops*

Stephania

With transport of rare chalices and bones
From distant crypts, hath been but to appease
That ancient pagan way by sacrifice
One who . . . but, stay, I will not question it,
I will not ask where you should put your trust.
You yield these offerings to the Church—tomorrow
I will receive them : we will bear together
Your coronation chlamys as a gift
To your great martyred friend—

Otho My Adalbert,

Whose spirit clung about me night and day,
And with sweet words persuaded me to love
My fatherland. Through fasting and through prayers
What comfort we received, from heavenly shapes
What prompting ! You remember afterward,
As he fared forth to bless unfriended men,
Thankless on foreign coasts, how in a dream
Gaudentius, his companion, saw a cup
Golden, half-full of wine, and stooped to drink,
But was forbidden, being told by one
About the altar that the cup was poured
For Adalbert, who pondered on the dream,
And in the green woods met his martyrdom
Next day with joy and singing.

Gerbert Where he fell

The heathens are untaught ; and there are youths
Ready in Samland to lay down their lives,
Whom I will consecrate. You must not sigh,

Stephania

And give me this sick answer. I am old,
And of the past in body; but my soul
Goes forth to you, to the fresh cycles governed
By your desirous visions; if you fail,
For me it simply must remain to die,
Who in your blessed empire found the sight
Sweetest to look on among human things.

(*OTHO bends over and softly caresses GERBERT, looking forth with a gaze of steadfast despair*)

Otho O agèd, holy eyes, give me your dew,
Weep over me, your tears are benison!
I could not leave the world, I did not give
The Saint the vows he sought for. I remain
Blind, indeterminate. I am grown old
In one short month; I see my life no more
Golden before me, but a length of days
Processional and ghastly: one by one
I mark them as they pass, they all are mine.
Weep over me and pray! I take this cross,
Charlemagne's own cross, so glorious in presage;
I kiss and press it to my breast, and yet
My eager prayer grows hollow. Pray, beloved!
I would be Emperor of the Universe.

(*Unseen, STEPHANIA comes forth at her full height from behind the column. She advances slowly till her form almost overshadows the Emperor*)

Stephania (Apart) Ay, truly; but Death dominates
the world!
The mountains burst in crevices of ice

Stephania

Or flame, the quivering forests wail for her,
And the sea surges into wasteful wrath
Of ebb and flow because it cannot die:
All things dread death, or sigh for her, or sue ;
None can be unconcerned. She brought this youth
Curious to Charlemagne's tomb ; and of a sudden,
As that composed and perfect majesty
Fell back, and left the golden ornaments
Glittering across the dust, he shall fall back,
His power shall wane.

(Their eyes meet; she turns and looks out over Rome)
O Italy, infect

This man with every poisonous influence
From marsh and sun and burning atmosphere,
From subtle, treacherous beauty and from love !

*(OTHO gently raises GERBERT and directs his gaze
towards STEPHANIA)*

Otho Who is this woman ?

Gerbert As the harlotry
She stands, we come to trample.

Otho *(Catching GERBERT's arm)* Oh, a muse !
Her foot is planted firm, she contemplates ;
Methinks she has grown weary watching us
So blind in our debate, and turned aside
At last ; her eyes bend dominant on Rome.

Gerbert Some messenger, or one who hath a suit.

Otho A figure from the Gods it had been said
By them of earliest time. Her head is crowned

Stephania

With crest of dazzling feathers. Gerbert, how
The silky plumes mix with her brazen hair !
And do you note the deep curves of her chin
Pushed up against the propping knuckles ? Speak !
She turns to us—to you.

Gerbert (To STEPHANIA) Who may you be ?

Stephania Rome, and you are her conquerors ; Rome
that waits

Upon your pleasure. (*She bows herself*)

Gerbert Daughter, tremble not ;
Our office is to save and purify,
To lift from degradation.

Stephania You are changed,
And you may change again : as night and day
Are men in crime and virtue. I have seen
A Pope led bleeding through the streets of Rome,
Dumb, blinded, a wine-bladder on his head
In token of derision. This was done
By a great Emperor fervent for the Church ;
Yet haply he may fall again as low
As in the sin for which his penitence
Has been accepted.

Gerbert Our most gracious lord
Has made atonement in a pilgrimage
Of sore humiliation for his too
Excessive rigour to usurping John.

Stephania Now he exalts the righteous, sets on high
Gerbert the true Archbishop ; Rome may now

Stephania

Count on a hearing of her wrongs, may even
Lift herself slowly from the miseries
In which she has been sunk, and claim the aid
Of those whose office, as you say, it is
To purify and succour. I have been
Wronged like my Italy, and she forgives.

(*To Otho*) Have not her nobles kneeled and kissed
your feet ?

(*Kneeling*) I too kneel down, I swear to be to you
Most faithful : I will never leave you—never !
You find your subjects slow ? These Romans, sire,
Have many things to dream on, but their dreams
Can never come to pass. They are not young
Like the Barbarians ; after long depression
They hear of liberty and nobleness
A little languidly. They are not young ;
They marvel when they hear from lips the down
Has scarcely covered of a world renewed.
Forgive them ! But to me your energy
Is beautiful, for some time in my youth
Great hopes possessed me.

(*She rises from her knees, her long mantle falls, and
she appears half uncovered before them*)

Otho (Apart) Can there be such gold
In women's breasts ? Is she a courtesan
Who stands intrepid as a prophetess,
And through her eyes' clear amber searches me ?

(*To Stephania*) Whose child are you ?

Stephania

Stephania (To Gerbert) Should he not ask whose wife ?

(To Otho) I have no parentage ; all that I am
You see. When Rome last ope'd her gates, the hour
That her great Consul fell, I ceased to be
Myself ; they bore me to the common hall
Of Teuton soldiers, and I issued thence
As altered as the Pythoness from fumes
Of Delphi's chasm . . . for I possessed the world.
A hush falls on you. In my womanhood

I was a poet. *(To Gerbert)* Can you exorcise . . .
And rid me of my perilous distraction
If I attend you daily in your cell ?

Gerbert O lady, haply after many prayers.

Stephania (To Otho) Although I have been wronged at
your command
In years gone past, now, since the time is changed,
I crave protection from your soldiery
Of you who cast me to them.

Otho God be witness

I have no least remembrance of such thing,
No spot of it, no token. You are lovely,
Are lovely, but unknown. What is your name ?

Stephania I was the consort of Crescentius when
Three years ago you beat against our gates,
And nothing has been happening to me since :
The soldiers took me from Saint Angelo
Where you had ordered they should hang his body
Over the battlement. It is a void

Stephania

I pass through. You have had experience—yea,
Doubtless encountered much fresh enterprise,
Adventure, and misfortune, hoped and prayed,
Loved and been loved again. I know how full
And visionary is a young man's life !
And now you have attained all you desire ;
You rule where once Crescentius ruled, you set
A Pope in place of him Crescentius chose,
You have Crescentius' wife within your power
To use at pleasure.

Otho Had he then a wife ?

Stephania He had till she survived her purity,
And others had divorced her from her faith :
He has no widow.

Otho Yet you can forgive ?

Have you more mercy than the heavens vouchsafe ?
Listen, if you have patience ! When I sinned
Against my soldier's promise, and against
The clemency I love, I was but scarce
Eighteen, and in mere boyish ruthlessness
I never thought of pain, nor of the reach
Of what I ordered—of Crescentius' wife
Nor child ; not even of God's beholding face,
Of my degraded knighthood, of the Church
Indignant at my cardinal offence :
All was forgotten that victorious day
When I beguiled your husband to his death.

Gerbert Our lord has wept and fasted for his sin

Stephania

As few so noble would. If you desire
Peace in your breast, do not provoke in his
The torment of the past, that self-contempt
That is so deadly when a man is young.

Otho Gerbert, you shall not think of me, before
This beautiful, wronged woman.

(*To Stephania*) You have asked
Protection ; my imperial word I pledge
God, there is no security for you
In my imperial word ! but by the vows
That one day I shall take in penitence,
I swear no harm shall touch you ; in my court
You shall be treated as a princess, service
Of honourable splendour shall be yours ;
My wealth is your possession.

Gerbert Lady, this
Is youth's unripe repentance : you who know
The dignity of wrongs, upon whose cheek
Asperities of sorrow may be seen
By older eyes than his, can estimate
The value of such comfort.

Stephania How you read
My bosom's deep conclusions !

(*To Otho*) I accept
Your offer ; to the palace I will come
As handmaid, not as princess : it may give
Cæsar a sense of mutability
In greatness to look on while I attend

Stephania

In the old Roman manner, as some slave—
His prize in war, filling the wine cup, spreading
The coolness of soft perfume through the rooms,
If he remember whence I fell, and what
I am—no ghost, a creature of warm blood,
Banished all lovely offices of life,
Having no tears to shed, with no regrets,
Remaining merely as a monument
Contending hosts have clashed against, that stands
Erect amid the carnage of the plains.

Otho Lady, is this your will ?

Stephania I have a name,
Stephania ; there is none in all the camp
But knows it ; I have nothing of my own.
And yet I would not have you think of me
Through any recollection : I am but
The death's head at your feast to sober you
In your distracting plenitude of power.

Otho Stephania !

Stephania No, my lord, you must not speak
In this low voice. All you can do for me
If my state touches you, is to reflect
My only ease is perfect lethargy.
You take me to your household, offer me
The shelter of your roof—it is enough.

(With a deep reverence she goes out)

Otho (Laughing hollowly) Crescentius—ha ! We are
well rid of him !

Stephania

He will no more offend us. O befooled,
To dash a traitor from the battlements,
Then think the act had damned us! Ignorance
Alone can damn, some huge and floundering crime
That smacks of chaos. Did I know her name?
The little light behind, the little light
Before, we call the past and future, seem
No more a revelation. She illumed
Wide worlds and for a moment, as a flame
That dances on the ruin it destroys.
I could not look on death? It would have been
More simple, for this woman summoned up
Such fantasies, such horror, such detail
Of deeds that I have never done, of thoughts
Strange to me, summoned them as memories,
That all I have to do is now to reap
What I have never sown. Damnation is
No more a thing that can be brought to pass,
Shrunk from, escaped; time has no hold on it,
There is no access to it. I am damned,
Damned in my very destiny.

Gerbert And therefore

Redemption was begun, not on the cross,
But deep in God's conception, deep in doom.
My son, we look back through creation's six
Most beauteous days to chaos, but before
The world was fashioned there was Providence:
In the most ancient realms of thought the word

Stephania

Lay in God's bosom ; therefore do the schools
Concern themselves with logic, to trace back
The love of Calvary to its source in One
Who had not yet dissevered night from day,
Nor gathered from the starry depth the stars.

Otho Love there—across the dreary infinite,
Love in the lone beginning ?—but for whom,
For me the spoiler, or for her the spoiled ?
If anything can ease my agony
It is that by heaven's mercy I at last
Have knowledge of the compass of my crime,
And can at last atone—at last—to her,
Who lives and may be comforted, made soft
As other women. Could I see her smile,
Or droop her eyes, or flush a little round
The temples ! Nothing in her countenance
Has the least change nor tremour ; she is like
A spirit sealed fast in the second Death
In which is no corruption. Do you think
That there can be abatement of her grief ?

Gerbert Within the cloister, after many days
Of cleansing and of penance.

Otho Did you say
The cloister, and for her ? O horrible !
And I deserve its horrors. She has done
No wrong, and you design to shut her up,
A jewel, in the darkness ? I can scarce
Conceive it possible how any woman

Stephania

Consents to part with her strong, flashing hair,
To swathe her delicate and beautiful
Young limbs in sackcloth. But three months ago
Sophia, my sole sister, slipt away
From Gandersheim, and with a mutinous
Band of girl-novices made haste to court.
I met them to reprove, but when they raised
Their veils of white, and when I saw the clear,
Deep crimson of their shaded cheeks, I swore
That they should live in freedom ; and that day
There was a music as of chaunting souls
About the palace, and the air was full
Of flowers.

Gerbert Be not so wanton ! You have sinned
Against Crescentius, and your sin hath been
Remitted ; but the baffled devil lurks
About to tempt you in Crescentius' wife.

Otho You misinterpret.

Gerbert She is beautiful ;
No apparition such as comes at night
To monks in fevered slumber—calm and strong,
Solid and queenly.

Otho Oh, of further reach
Her mystical, marred beauty ! She is sacred,
More terrible than in virginity ;
My victim, yet—O God!—as Rome herself
Is deemed my victim, Rome that I shall raise
Into a Commonwealth.

Stephania

Gerbert (Drawing him toward the loggia) Think not of her.

Stand forth and face the city ! It was thus
We stood together, my belovèd, thus
Waiting the day of judgment, on the eve
Of the Millenium : the sun declined
How slowly on the verge ; in a great host
The stars shone forth ; there was no omen, nought
To terrify : and when the morning dawned
In simple white and rose we wept for joy,
And kissed the earth and still wept silently
When the hosannas of the multitude
Clashed up to us because the world was saved.

Otho That was two years ago.

Gerbert As yesterday

I think of it (*Turning, he gazes over the city and sighs*).

Otho (Apart) The marvel of her skin !
No cloud with gold in it and bosomed rain
E'er mixed so wonderful a dusk.

Gerbert (Approaching suddenly) Remember
To-morrow you must lay Justinian's Laws
Into the judges' hands. . . . I shall not sleep ;
There is no wakefulness like that of night,
So penetrative and so keen, the mind
Has then her true creative right to part
The elements of thought, distributing
To each its term.

Otho (Looking out) What clarity of air

Stephania

Above the roofs, what magic in the rims
Of the low purple hills! It is a land
To press against one's heart. O Gerbert, leave me;
The beauty is too much.

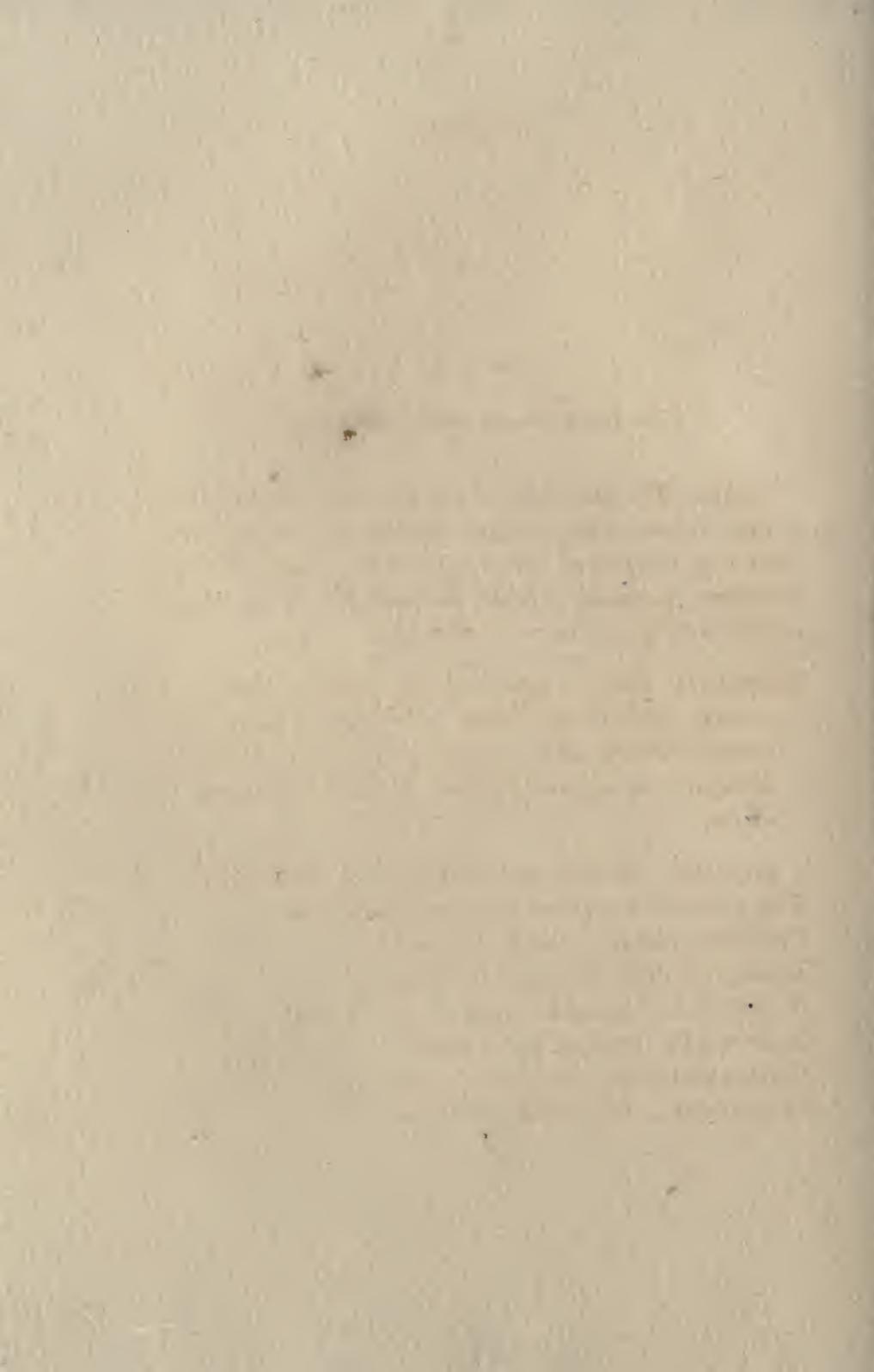
A sense of ruin
Comes over me at sight of such a sky,
So soon to close in darkness.

Search the stars,
Look deep into my destiny; so strange
A languor creeps upon me, I could say
Those powers that breed within a man's own breast
The very mood and temper of his fate
Move noiselessly within. More deeply search
My doom, and I will pray—O wonderful!—
Against the rhythmic heavens—

Gerbert That I shall watch.

LA LUXURE

Ma colère vaut la tienne



Stephania

ACT II

LA LUXURE—*Ma colère vaut la tienne.*

SCENE—*The same hall of the old palace. To the right a table strewn with scientific instruments: to the left an altar: at the foot of the crucifix skulls, jewels, broidered vestments, fragments of bones, and part of a skeleton propped against a reliquary, burning with gems.*

STEPHANIA enters, simply dressed, with a basket and pruning knife in her hand. She gives a hasty glance toward Gerbert, who is reclining asleep in a chair richly wrought; then opens a shutter: the sun strikes across the shrine.

Stephania Science, and learning, and the crucifix!
The Emperor hath been here upon his knees,
Unlocking coffers, or with duteous lip
Kissing the dusty jewels of the dead.
No speech has passed between us; as I served
In silence by the altar, laid a skull
Beside this burning topaz, wrapt the jaws
Of eloquent S. Just in folds of silk—

Stephania

He bent his eyes more close in scrutiny
Of the mosaic circles on the floor,
Until I moved away. It is not gold
That is omnipotent, nor holiness
That gives its gold: I am omnipotent;
And if I still am busy with my herbs,
And watch the blowing of untoward flowers
Ere I express my poisons, I abandon
No tittle of my purpose. The old Pope
Is sleeping in the heat of afternoon;
But I may break his privacy—this hour
He gave me for confession. If I ring
His heavy crosier sharp against the stones,
The shock may startle him to consciousness.

(She lays down her basket and knife in the shadow. She advances as she throws the crosier to the ground)

Gerbert (Waking of a sudden) The stars are adverse
. . . . from some evil dream
I am aroused. Can Romuald read the stars,
And thrust his sickle into destiny?
Hath Romuald learning? *(Perceiving Stephania)*
What, from Babylon
You come—I cannot recollect the dream—
And such confusion from the golden light.
It was the treasure dancing in the sun
That scared and dizzied me, for I perceive
You are—

Stephania Stephania,—and I must believe

Stephania

The seven deadly sins make in my breast
Their common lair, or men less fearfully
Would eye me as I pass ; but you will count
The list of my transgressions, will assign
My fitting penance, and procure me peace.

Gerbert Ay, presently ; yet I am much to blame
That I delay the hearing of your griefs.
Come to me . . . but that hour the catacomb
Of Severus is unsealed.

Stephania The Emperor
O'er-tasks you. He is young.

Gerbert Hour after hour
I have stood by apportioning his gifts,
Lauding his zeal ; at sight of all these gems
His face filled with a lovely joyousness.
He sees not what I suffer.

Stephania Holy Pope,
I kneel and make avowal that I share
Your sorrow : as I waited in this hall
Last evening, with no courage to advance,
Yet stubborn with despair, I heard a secret
Pass between him and you. I may not speak
Of what I suffered—women use their pain
To find the pain of others. As I listened,
Crescentius died once more, and once again
Hope left my pulse ; then steadily I fathomed
The trouble in your heart. Such youth, such glory
Shut in a wasteful dungeon, and the world

Stephania

Left ruining for one repented sin !
And yet I cannot doubt your friend will live
If he have joy and freedom, if you foster
In him all seeds of royalty.

Gerbert By arts.

I know not of he must be weaned from him
Who hath estranged us, from the cursed monk.

Stephania From Romuald of S. Emmeran ?

Gerbert You divine—

A creature skilled to blemish and deflower.
Ravenna's piny rock is as the mouth
Of hell to me.

Stephania And as a demon thence
I have been chased with execration. When
The Germans, trooping to the northern war,
Left me to die in a deserted camp,
I found myself beneath the hermit's knoll
By penitents and pilgrims wound about,
And in my great forlornness drew one day
Close to his feet and kissed them.

With sharp cries,
As he were bitten by a serpent's fang,
He scourged, he tore me—but my speech offends.
How different from you who give me help,
Who suffer me in sight of holy things.

Gerbert There is no chastity in solitude,
No pity where the footsteps are not thick,
No hope that is not selfishness conceived

Stephania

Where there are none to succour or exalt.
Your story moves my anger. From your knees
Rise! (*He lifts her*) You have borne great woe: I would
not judge you
Without prolonged, excessive mindfulness
Of all the evil chances of the lot
That wove your actions.

Let the Emperor know
That Romuald shamed you thus.

Stephania Till he abhor
As I the miscreant. You have set your love,
I fear, on one of little gratitude,
If it be possible he so can doubt
Your power to bind and loose, he constitutes
A freakish monk disposer of his fate.
The world rings with the story of your zeal
For Otho's house—yet, pardon, holy father,
Your handmaid in her waiting misery
Alone hath comprehended with what passion
It urges, it consumes you. I believed
The man you love my foe; but he is young,
And would repair the past. The man you hate
I have firm heart to injure: if he triumph,
The lovely, royal head on which you dote—

Gerbert O woman, hush! You have surprised my love
By fine intelligence of what it is,
The reach of its desire, its nether depths
Of insatiety.

Stephania

Stephania (Settling her raiment) And from a child
You fixed your heart on him?

Gerbert Although the boy
Would leave me for a falcon or a dog;
Though on the day he started, scarce fifteen,
To travel southward for his holy crown,
He chafed at my embrace. When we were severed,
My soldier in the camp, I in the schools,
What messages, what tokens, what remorse
Pursued me! It is insupportable
To breathe beside him with the consciousness
That he is growing alien—whom I love
With such constriction of the heart my prayers
Grow ruddy as with life-blood at his name,
Who is my dream incarnate, half my God.

Stephania You shall not lose him. We must bind
his soul
By some great vow that in solemnity
Outweighs the trembling promise to the monk.
Exert your full authority, assume
S. Peter's very style, and summon him
To arms as a crusader.

Gerbert It is said
I cannot die till in Jerusalem
I celebrate the mass. Does that portend
We shall combine one day in battle fields,
With glittering armies to exterminate,
Such as he dreamed of when he used to push

Stephania

His tiny fists up in his hair until
They met in a clenched band about his brow,
When I bent down to tell of Lucifer,
And all the spotted splendour of that field
Where pride was in dishonour ?

Stephania From his cave
The foul recluse will peer. A troop of kings,
Young warriors in their prime, shall pass him by
With laughter on their lips and insolence
Of faith in uncontrolled prosperity ;
The hermit shall retire to private prayer
Among his vermin, and the world be saved.

Gerbert (*Nervously beginning to handle his papers*)
S. Peter's very style ! There have been letters
Of this great quality before—

Stephania (*Wiping her brows with a richly-perfumed handkerchief*)
And think
Of all the East would be to him, the warm,
Sweet women in their veils ? But you are sick.
Gerbert Leave me awhile. Stephania, I am old
And fevered, at the very end of life ;
And the long journey, all the blazing track
About the desert, where the sun stands still,
Affright me : I shall faint upon the road ;
And yet he never must set forth alone.

Stephania (*Scanning him more narrowly*)
Your eyes are as numb sentinels that keep

Stephania

Their post and do not watch. Such vigilance
Will end soon in vacuity and death.

You have too heavy cares. Would you but drink
A potion I could press from certain herbs,
You were secure until the century,
The new-born century itself were old.

I know Campagna's countless fields of flowers,
When they will bud, when drop—what juicy stalks
Will lift men up from languishment. Refused
The comfort of the cloister, I am fain
To rove, and joy to seek in loneliness
For balsams on the hills. The ranker air
Of the low, burning marshes I can breathe
Unhurt; I have no scruple and no fear,
Therefore my knowledge is of quality
At once most secret and most terrible.

Gerbert You move me—

Stephania To a curiosity
Perchance, but to no credence.

(*Flinging herself round Gerbert's knees*) Holy Pope,
You came not to my Italy to crush
And trample; you would raise my Romans up,
And under your dominion, should you live,
The Emperor, coldly worshipped yesterday,
Will be beloved, beneficent. Consent
To let me be your leech, and, while you mock
And disregard me, you will feel your powers
Press to expansion as the buds in spring.

Stephania

Gerbert Go, fetch your cordial.

(*Exit Stephania*) For I cannot die,
And leave him to be sucked up by the fiend.
Ah, could this woman—with what sway of grace
She moved—revive in me the mysteries
Of youth, revive my spirit's sunken fires ;
As sometime hath been seen by unforeshadowed
And sudden inrush of some energy
The mazy goings of the world are broken
And thrown into new issues : if I might
Endure on earth for the next hundred years,
Who have divined so deeply, who have still
So much to proffer ; for to be the thing
One dreams, a man, a parent, or a Pope,
Is but to find oneself at last in ken
Of a beginning, feeble from the birth,
And full of strange, initiatory pangs :
If in the future one could win the right
Of learning that wide way that draws its secret
From every science, as its property
Is drawn from herb and rock ! These ornaments
Would purchase a whole text of Cicero
From far *Scriptoria* : but the boy I love
Is still a rank barbarian, and for him
There must be magic, there must be the East.

(*Otho enters, wearing his coronation cloak*)

Otho How beautiful are gifts, how beautiful
Is reparation ! I am full of joy,

Stephania

For Rome is growing statelier, the red steeples
Are mixing with the cypresses ; S. Paul's,
The cloisters of S. John of Lateran
Are rising from the ground with marble shafts
In banded couples : and the reliquaries
Are richer than the churches ; from the rock
Of the obscurest catacombs and from
The hot sides of Soracte, holy bones
Are parted by my zealous ministers.
Gerbert, it surely is a better way
Of doing penance to enrich the world
Than to make poor one's spirit and deform
One's span of life. I will not for myself
Keep any wealth, not even this glorious cloak
Traced with the whole Apocalypse in gold
On blue, 'mid sprinkled stars, where I can count,
For they are on my breast, the jewelled stones
Of the great city, New Jerusalem—
Jasper, and sapphire, and chalcedony,
Green chrysoprase, and every gate a pearl ;
Or where in sombre dyes I find the place
Of the seven woes, one hidden in the clasp,
One disappearing in this silken fold.
The angels stand superb of stature, here
Low fiends revolt, and here the Woman rides
Triumphantly in scarlet. Let us take
My coronation chlamys in our hands,
And lay it on the tomb of Adalbert,

Stephania

Praying my friend to look upon my grief,
And cover my transgression.

(Coming closer) You are busied
With many papers. Is there anything
Among them from Ravenna?

Gerbert Nothing.

Otho Once

I cut away the strings so hurriedly,
Knowing a scroll brought comfort from my well-
Beloved Archbishop; but I dread the sight
Of Romuald's hand. If I could only rest
From thought of him!

Gerbert He shall not trouble you.

Otho In this wide, burning sunshine I forget
My doom as if it were an exhalation
Of last night's dusk, an insubstantial thing;
But when I sleep I see Crescentius' face
With Romuald's habit, and the two are one
I cannot disentangle, though I strive
Till daybreak in an agony.

(Glancing at the cloak) But if
I do not hug my treasure, if I show
The hermit that I am not covetous,
Is there not hope he may grow placable?

(*Gerbert, with clouded brow, continues writing as he replies*)

Gerbert It is to me a cause of private grief
Otho should be unmanned—of heavier moment
My knowledge that the Turk defiles *His* tomb

Stephania

Whose majesty I bear. To-day I write
A mandate from S. Peter summoning
All Christian princes to the Holy War.

Otho O stormy Paradise, O sacred lust
Of battle—and you know I cannot join,
I dare not mingle with you.

Gerbert In your stead
I have another pupil.

Otho Ah, you mean
The son of Capet, whom you never loved.
As you have loved me, who is dull in war,
Who cannot press his prayers into a blow;
Yet should God choose him to confound the strong,
And take Jerusalem by miracle,
Think how my heart was broken and forbid;
Let me be buried there!

Gerbert You would bespeak
A sacred sepulchre within the land
That you have never travailed to redeem.
Nay, but Christ's soldiers shall alone have part
In Jewry's blessed soil. How deep so e'er
The sin of the Crusader, his offence
Is cast behind God's back. They who received
News from the starry messengers of great
Goodwill on earth to men returned not home
With hearts more bland and musical than theirs
Who shall respond *God wills it* to the word
Of my poor invocation.

Stephania

(*With firmer energy*) On the plains
Of Palestine there will be misery,
Hunger and thirst and bitter weariness,
Such as the hermit with his stinted crust
And formal patch of labour wots not of.
Return to Romuald, play at keeping fast,
Suffer through senseless vigil, while at siege
Of the great Eastern cities men keep watch
Under a leaden roof of sun, or drag
Through deserts where the fountain is mirage.

Die at Ravenna in the piny grot
'Mid prayers and sacraments ; while, with the howl
Of jackals on his scent, with Saracens
In tramp across the field, more fearlessly
The young crusader gives his soul to God.
No need to him of priest, no need to him
Of absolution ; deep within his breast
Is peace, the manna, and the hidden name
Inscribed by his Redeemer.

(*He advances and stretches forth his hands towards the Emperor*) Otho, come !

(*Folding him in his arms*) O my beloved, you shall not
be discrowned,
You must not ; Heaven hath made this royal path
For penitents (*Pointing to the Crucifix*). Turn to your
Glorious King
So patient in His bonds, who cannot stoop
To save Himself.

Stephania

Otho (Bowing before the Crucifix) Doth not the Gracious Form

Bend down to bless ? I am at last beloved,
Accepted, and of Thee ! Thou deignest thus
To make me Captain of Thy Holy Wars,
To choose the very service I can give
With strength and joy. Tears rush into my eyes,
Great sorrows are appeased, and hope once more
Springs inexhaustible as light itself.
God, I obey Thy summons !

(STEPHANIA re-enters with a phial ; she lays a letter on the table. At a motion from GERBERT she withdraws into the shadow on the further side of the altar, where she stoops to take up her basket and knife. OTHO rises ; he turns abruptly and fixes his eyes on the letter)

Who has laid

This packet on the table with its seal ?
I stand before it sealed ; I have no power
To touch or understand it, but I know
Profoundly what is written.

It shall burn,
It shall be hacked to pieces.

(He is about to snatch it, when he recoils, white and trembling, then moves into the deep window-seat, where he stands absorbed as if in a trance)

Gerbert (In a low voice to STEPHANIA, who steps softly up to him) What is this, Woman, that you have brought to him ?

Stephania

Stephania It bears
The seal of the Camaldoli ; a monk
Bade me deliver it.

Gerbert (*Observing Otho*) He has no sight,
No consciousness, his attitude is hard.
What obloquy of sorrow to behold
His lost and trembling face ! I am too shaken
To speak with him again ; it were dishonour
Too deep to make him iterate the promise
That he has sworn to me and to his God.
Stephania, you have beauty, dedicate
Yourself to his deliverance ; use the famed
And unexpressive powers of womanhood.
I leave him in your hands ; when you approach
His lips are crisp, his blue eyes scintillate
With metal flash, and that low brow of his
Clears of untoward thoughts.

Stephania Pursue your plans,
Build up the Empire ; I will entertain
My lord and keep him from Ravenna's snares.
(*Holding out the phial*) But, as the sun drops, you will
deign to taste
Of my poor housewife's wizardries ?

Gerbert (*Heedlessly gripping the phial, with his eyes
on OTHO as he retires*) Farewell !

(*Exit*)

(*STEPHANIA remains in an attitude of submission ; from
the distance she acutely watches the Emperor*)

Stephania

Stephania I see my failure certain if I speak,
Or touch him, for inapprehensiveness
Is round him as a cloud, for beauties now
Would be unranged above their opposites,
And take a level place. The very air
That rippled up to my averted eyes
Brought messages from his when he descended
This morning from his chamber. Afterward
He sang a German ballad, but I came
Like silence to his voice: each time I heave
My bosom something of his manhood falls;
I have no fear, if I am opportune,
That virtue will defeat me or religion,
Beyond these blunted moments.

(STEPHANIA passes out, with her basket and pruning-knife.
The sound of the door, as it closes after her, awakes the
Emperor from lethargy; with a deep breath
he starts up and turns to the table)

Stephania

Will gather Romuald's messages.

(He reads) *Your gifts*

Are useless, for you will not give yourself.

You lose what you would keep. And here he says,

I pray vain prayers that when you come to die

You may be quiet in hell, and know its pains

To be your portion of eternal love.

(Otho's hands grow stiff as he grasps the parchment; he remains for a long while rigid and silent. Then a softness comes into his face, and the scroll drops from his hand)

God cannot be entreated. I return

To the unbroken cloud! He takes no bribes;

How like a king He is! And I am glad

At heart that He has flung away my dross,

And made all true betwixt us.

(He goes up to the altar, strips it of the jewels, and kneels before the crucifix)

Here at last

I kneel, with no petition, and adore.

How vain it is to hope, how vain to love,

To suffer and to bleed!—

(He rises and turns from the crucifix, looking back on it with lingering eyes: then he stares drearily at the dalmatica, and the treasure dashed down from the altar)

Or to enjoy!

I must just wait and watch; I cannot mingle

With any project more.

(Suddenly turning toward the loggia with a despairing cry)

Stephania

And yet I must

Have interest for my senses or go mad.

(He looks out; in the distance are the rising churches, the fortifications. Under the grassy columns of an ancient temple a woman glides, and then pauses.)

My soldiers and my workmen ! So they reared

The Tower of Babel, built it brick by brick.

I would I had been there to see it fall,

Or to be buried in the masonry

Where none could dig. That figure by the arch

At least is not concerned with me, fulfils

No dream of my begetting. With a touch

How delicate she snaps the twigs, and chooses

So slowly as if wise, for leaf by leaf

She thins her plant. The woman interests me

By that unusual grace of plucking herbs

Above her head. She sees a larger growth

High on the very key-stone of the arch,

And grapples with the cluster as a prize.

She hangs upon its branches, all her clothes

Fall back ; the strain of her endeavour brings

The tuft, the block of sculptured marble down

In ruin, and reveals her face. It is

Stephania's ! From the Temple of the Moon

She hurls a noble fragment, and remains

Contemptuous of its downfall as she plaits

A basket with her leaves. How solitary

She looks, and yet how strong ! I keep aloof,

Stephania

For in her presence unfamiliar fiends
Are roused in me, temptations that arrest,
That fill me with a curiosity
To prove their magic promises, that stand
About, and wait as if with harnessed steeds.
I wonder why she gathered herbs at eve
From Dian's fane, and yet so wantonly
Has shattered it; she lures and irritates
Within the shade; but, as she moves along,
She calms by merely walking.

(*STEPHANIA passes out of sight. After a while servants move about the hall with lights and golden dishes*)

I despair

Of finding happiness at all 'mong men;
They cast it out with arguments; like nature,
Like poetry is a woman, and like them
She stirs an agitation as of waves,
A trouble that is ecstasy. The night
Falls from its lonesome distances, the stars.
Still vacillate and do not shine. I hear
The glad cries of the city and its songs;
There is a light behind me. (*He turns*) What a blaze,
As if my servants meant to make a feast!
One enters bearing wine, and with the flask
Two cups. Ah, I remember, one is mine,
And one is set for Gerbert. I could laugh
That this illumination should be made
For him, a bent, old man, who holds discourse

Stephania

On substance and on number ; while I know,
As candle after candle springs and burns,
I could not listen. (*To a servant*) It is not our will
You summon the most reverend Pope to-night ;
We have a matter we would lay before
The lady called Stephania, and we beg
That she will visit us. (*The servants go out*)

What have I done ?

It is a trifle ! I shall ask the name
She gives her sombre garland ; and perchance
The useless, festive look about the room
Will cease to haunt me if she enter it.
We shall be both indifferent ; for she was
Crescentius' wife, and she will understand
I sent for her from courtesy. These tapers
Seem to accomplish some great rite and dance
As if before a Power ! I am myself
Impatient and responsive to—I cannot
Conceive what hidden joy, for there is nothing
To come, except an easeful hour, the pleasure
Of speaking with a woman, and of seeing
The answers of her face. I hope my servants
Will say no word to Gerbert ; he might find
Some disrespect in what I do, or blame it
As levity. Is that unruffled sound
Her coming ? (*He sees her in the distance*)
She has altered her attire !
I hate her for the change that she has made ;

Stephania

The metal spangles on her robe, the roses
Within her hair bewilder me. I turn
Cold as in snow ; my forehead damps my hand ;
I have no more a wish to speak to her.

(*He walks back to the window as STEPHANIA enters*)

How even the twilight is implacable,
For it is drawing round as if to shut
The candelabra closer in their glow !
It does not bring concealment, it expresses
The spirit out of fire, until the room
Is terrible in splendour.

Stephania I am here :
What would my lord impart to me ?

Otho How quickly
You have responded !

Stephania It displeases you ?
Your servants bade me hasten ; but, as Cæsar
Is unprepared, I shall at leisure wait
His second summons.

Otho Stay.
Stephania If I am here
It is to serve your will, for I was told
I should be honoured with some confidence.

Otho On nothing that concerns the commonwealth,
Nor anyone in Rome save you and us—
(*Facing her*) Stephania, you avoid me in the Court,
You move remote as if dissatisfied,
You watch me, yet I never meet your glance ;

Stephania

Your mouth is silent. What is the offence
You find in my behaviour, for I seek
To change your fortunes, to persuade your anger
To condonation of the past? . . . And yet
I cannot think of anything gone by,
While thus you stand before me, thus renewed,
So actual in your beauty.

Stephania Of old times

Few care to think in chambers bright as this,
With wine upon the table. You are tired,
Your eyes are troubled; do not question me:
My grievous moods I put away the moment
I crossed your threshold; yea, when 'mid my hair
I laced the perfumed roses. You forget
That I am learned in pleasure. On your brows
Since you return to Rome there is no joy.

Otho For I have no forgiveness.

Stephania Whom, my lord,
Have you offended, if it be not I?
Whom else would you appease?

Otho Why, there is God.

Stephania And He is pitiless?

Otho Here lies a scroll
From Romuald, the great saint, who sentenced me
To take the vows of the Camaldoli,
And expiate my sin. I could not yield
My boundless youth to walls, and to the circle
Of daily liturgies, of lonesome prayers,

Stephania

Nor leave the burning blue world for the dark.
I could not be discrowned, even before God ;
My royalty revolted, though my sins
Must stay across the cover of the Book
Of Life, undimmed by penitence : instead,
I forced the gates of Rome, I flashed the splendour
Of Greece across the Court, I heaped the shrines
With carbuncles, with ouches ; and for this,
So Romuald writes, God has me in such hate
He has appointed me my heritage
Within the everlasting fire.

Stephania Make certain
Then of your condemnation, do not tarry
Between your good and evil, take all earth
Can offer, ere you play your part in hell.
My lord, how pale you turn ?

Otho Such Roman valour
Is in your words—all that the earth can give !
Stephania, you must yield what else in vain
I should entreat the universe to grant,
If you would have me reckless as the blood
Is in my frame to-night. That cruel saint
I knelt to at Ravenna sent me forth
To Rome with the prediction I should die,
Because I would not cowl my helmèd brows
For sake of sin committed when a boy,
Before I knew that mercy must attend
Even the establishing of mighty aims,

Stephania

Before my eyes were open to receive
The beauty of your presence. O forgive !
No more remember my abhorred deed,
Nor my abhorred indifference to yourself.
Wipe the past clean, for if we laugh at judgment
We must have naught behind us we can see.

Stephania (Aside) Crescentius, turn away ; forgive
your wife !

He made me an adulteress.

(*To Otho*) You are mad.
You join me to your destiny ?

Otho I know
At last that woman is the guardian form
Above life's secret treasures. Do not close
Your lips as if in pain. Ah, now you smile ;
You let your eyes rest full upon my eyes,
A breath breaks from you and you stoop. O love,
I kneel before this kiss. Condemned to death
For ever, let me die within your arms ;
Let them encompass me as Phlegethon
Binds the last doom with fire.

Stephania You kneel to one
Whose pride is broken, round about whose beauty
No limit now is set that admiration
Or longing can transgress ; one who is freed
From reticence, who frees from all restraint
As nature doth, who gives and who receives
With the mere general temper of the earth ;

Stephania

Who understands no homage to herself,
Nor heeds it for endowments that delight,
And that men always praise.

Otho There is no pride
In this confession that necessity
Is on me to adore you ? Let it seem
But passion for your touch or for your smile,
This mouth exactly formed, these wondrous tresses
Of filbert-yellow to your ear, and thence
More orient in their curve : it is enough
To praise you for these things : yet in my joy
There is a love so piercing that it reaches
Beyond what I can see, or ever speak,
Beyond my senses, and beyond my will,
Since I am lost beyond my conscience too.

Stephania You still reprove yourself, you have not
chosen
Quite to renounce the cloister ; you are yet
But half-determined—miserable pause !

Otho You know I cannot quit the rule of men,
The conduct of my armies, the protection
Of my elected pope, a spirit linked
With mine to force achievement ; and for this
I shall be damned. Then let me have the pleasure
For which you have illuminated all
Capacities within me. I demand
What every youth about me long ago
Has cried for and obtained. I do not think—

Stephania

Why should I?—of your nearness to my crime;
I do not see you as Crescentius' wife.

Stephania Why should you?

Otho All offences are related,
Are of a kin; it matters not how one
Deals with another, for between the brood
Shame is a thing unknown. I almost fear
That I am mad with these appalling weeks
Of struggle and recoil. You, you alone
Have brought me splendid sorrows; all the rest
Were dark as night and hapless as the grave;
You tortured me with glory, with the fire
Prometheus lit in man. I am a Greek,—
Born Greek: I worship beauty as they worshipped
In that old land of cities. I have loved
The light of learning; it was but the moon
Against the sun when loveliness appeared
Bright on your brow and bosom. I have loved
My shining crowns, but in your voice there is
That which deposes sovereigns. More than Greece—
For she is half a fable—I have loved
My Rome, creator of my visions, destined
To be fulfilment's prize, but in your flesh
Rome is more living than in stately walls,
As mystic, though less changed.

Stephania I am descended
From purest Roman stock; before Augustus
Was made, like you, an Emperor, my forefathers

Stephania

Had borne Crescentius' title.

Otho But your brows
Are conscious and imperial, they belong
To ages of dominion and of pleasure
Unequalled in Olympus when the Gods
Were satisfied with sacrifice, and Hebe
Brought them the heavenly cup. I have forgotten
The drear religion that I loved, the folly
Of seeking unseen hopes. You stand supreme,
As blonde as honey, soft to look on, softer
To touch, with glittering robe, and roses fallen
Red-coloured down your hair : I see in you
All that I want.

Stephania And I in Cæsar find
Desire fulfilled.

Otho Stephania, O my life,
I shudder at avowal from your heart
You long to bless me. It is terrible
As birth or death to feel one is beloved :
To meet with beauty in untried embrace
Is anguish like first meeting with the air,
Or losing it again in final dust
When what was born must die ; and yet the joy
Is past the limit of existence, needing
A paradise to breathe in.

Stephania You are mine,
Though ignorant as yet of what I say
When I proclaim you mine. Experience

Stephania

Alone can give its slow discoveries
Of gain and triumph to our intercourse.
Yet I shall ease your senses with a sudden
Initiation into liberty ;
And you will stay a craving of my spirit,
A need of you that actuates each thought.
My arms are empty—Come !

Otho O exultation

To meet you as your captive in our love !
The cressets do not burn—you burn, until
All else is darkness. Your blown roses mingle
Their vivid petals, and a fire of gold
Leaps from your robe. I cannot drink the wine :
It is too weak : but I desire your beauty
As Hades' ghosts craved blood, for I have been
A phantom of myself since Romuald's curse.
The taste of life, its nourishment, its truth
Are mine to-night, and in your deep embrace
Forgiveness is accorded. Nothing more
Has the ungenerous heaven to do with us,
Who pardon and are pardoned, who attain
Hope by each other, who from very guilt
Have drawn a perfect issue.

Stephania (Suddenly flinging him back)

O my prize,
My great reward for unimagined pains,
Will you, whose head shall rest where fate is joy,
Dare in to-morrow's sun to cast me off,

Stephania

Disowning gifts that cannot be returned,
And leaving kisses like a crowd of leaves
Under the nipt acacias for a sign
And memory of to-night ?

Otho You catch my hands,
You have an aspect fierce and like a corpse ;
Change back to splendour, for you damp my mood.
O love, my glory, I am hurrying on,
On, past you to the tomb. It is for you
To breathe on me, to let your resonant,
Firm voice strike through me, to keep sharp and clear
The outline of my life, for all is fading
Around me and must fade. What, cast you off
Who love me, who forgive ! But I will rather
Cleave to you till I die of your embrace.
I must be yours for ever !

Stephania Ay, till death.

ENLAÇONS-NOUS

C'est moi qui te rends sérieuse ; enlaçons-nous !

Stephania

ACT III.

C'est moi qui te rends sérieuse ; enlaçons-nous !

SCENE.—*The same hall of the Old Palace, next morning. Gerbert stands by the door of the Emperor's bed-chamber, to the right. He knocks, listens for a while, then drops his hands. An expression of withered agony settles on his face.*

Gerbert The Emperor sleeps though Rome is in revolt :

He gives no sign. Thrice have I summoned him,
And thrice a woman's voice hath made excuse.
I did not think to visit him again,
To stoop to exhortation, but his throne
Is tottering, and I cannot see him fall.
I cannot see him compassed by a crowd
Of rebels, yet, my God ! I can no more
Go forth and speak for him. A dizzy fear
Is come upon me, and within my frame
I feel strange preparations for decay—
A sickness worse than sickness, as the prophet,

Stephania

When he puts dust and ashes on his head
To show his people's anguish, suffers more
Than when the destined city is become
The image of his plight.

I stand in time

At that most tragic moment when the change
Of offices begins, when he who poured
His bounty must stretch forth his hand for alms,
When he who guided must be led. I thought
Otho would take the change so graciously,
Foster as I had fostered him, recall
The way I humoured him in restive moods,
Contract the habit of my patience, break
His purpose softly to me. Is it age,
I wonder, very age that severs us ?
My youth is in the future—there we met,
There we made happiness ; but now he hugs
The present merely, I remain by him
A shrunk, old man.

God, if he vacillate

The city will be lost ! Again I hear
Soft laughter from the room—a wanton's laugh—
O degradation ! Yet it hurts me less
That he should perish 'mid such infamies
As the old Roman Emperors made their boast,
Whom men still count as idols and in secret
Still spread the fame of, than to see him swayed
By one who would invest him with the cowl,

Stephania

Stripping the majesty that God Himself
Stoops to with adoration when He stoops.

(More confidently) But if I wrong him ! It may be he arms,
And will come forth a soldier, capable
Among his soldiers. Alexander thus
Was quick in love and war.

(Suddenly catching sight of Romuald's letter)

I cannot doubt
There hath been wisdom in my policy ;
For here is the monk's letter torn across,
And here are fallen roses. Both old men,
Both pitted in resolve to dominate
The boy we love—while Romuald tempts his soul
To great renunciation, I have set
Simply a pleasure by him, and am dumb.

(Enter Otho and Stephania. The Emperor advances with
uncertain step ; he grasps Stephania's hand, from
time to time gazing back at her with an
expression of intense worship)

Otho To think the dear, unpardonable crime
Hath been accomplished, that you are possessed,
And such new hopes and possibilities
Have sprung to birth ! What, did you think I slept,
And count yourself forsaken ? But for you
I culled the odours of a thousand flowers,
As in enchanted passion I pursued
The honey-bird that draws men to such sweets
As lie in aromatic forests far

Stephania

Among the secret boughs. I was not slack
In service, prompted to my task by all
The mystical alacrity of love.

You are not richly dressed, not gems enough.

*(Otho draws Stephania to the foot of the crucifix, and decks
her with jewels and ornaments)*

Oh, how delicious are these emeralds,
This amber, and this gold. They were to mix
With dead men's bones, Saint Justin's reliquary
Was to be spangled thus. Could God intend

Another destination for His gems

Than this, and this? *(Decking her throat and wrists)*

But for the dull, sweet hair
A diadem is lacking. Roses—nay,
But you shall be my empress. Do you start?
You have no apprehension of my love,
My restless adoration. All the world
I would make subject to you. If I journey
Now to the East, it will be to return
Laden with spices that you have not smelt,
With wonders that you have not dreamed, with dyes
That will enhance your beauty. Deck your robes,
And I myself will fetch you my own crown
For trial till we have these amethysts
Pressed close into a circle for your brow.

*(While Otho is decking Stephania, Gerbert stands as if
petrified, but angrily presses up to him as he turns
from the altar)*

Stephania

Gerbert (To Otho) Come, in Christ's name, come forth. If Rome be lost— [Exit *Otho*

(To Stephania) Woman, what have you done?

Stephania I have defrauded Your foe and mine.

Gerbert But Otho—think of him!

What have you done? The lovely, limpid eyes
Are as black velvet, and the tremulous,
Bright lips are stiff with fever.

Stephania He is ill.

Gerbert How—ill, and in your care? You said you had
Strange knowledge—

Stephania Of malignant, baleful herbs,
And of their transmutations; but this boy
I find so far upon his road to death
That nothing can arrest him; Italy
Hath laid her fatal hands on him: the utmost
That I can do is to forbid his flight
To Romuald, and secure your great revenge.

Gerbert What hope have I, what enemy, by whom
Can I be injured if he perish, if
The yellow autumn creep into his leaves?

Stephania Your face is grey.

Gerbert Have pity on him, think
How you can heal him.

Stephania But it scarce becomes
A mistress to be tedious in discharge
Of the unhonoured functions of a nurse.

Stephania

Gerbert O woman, do not stand so patiently
Coiling your hair ! The town is full of treason,
The Emperor is in peril, may be slain :

I have no care for man, no care for God,
Except he walk in splendour. Are you just
His leman, that you listen with those wide,
Unsoftened eyes ; and would you let him die,
Die at your feet, and give no shout for help ?

(Snatching her robe) Stephania, you must bring him to
himself ;

I am grown old, irresolute.

Stephania You lay
So many duties on me ; yesternight
I was to vanquish Cæsar that old way
Delilah took with Samson. I have shorn
His locks, and for the Roman Philistine
I fear my hero is in sorry trim.

(Restraining *Gerbert* who, with a passionate gesture, seeks
to reach the inner room)

You think to rule him ; you are eloquent.
Old man, it is not thus that youth is ruled ;
These roses, and this arm about his neck
To pull the thorns back from his wavy hair,
Will stablish a dominion you will stand
Helpless before and execrate. He comes.

(Re-enter *Otho*)

Gerbert Otho !—Ah, God, his weary, roving eyes !—
The city is in tumult. Do not smile

Stephania

So hurriedly ; you must ride down the streets,
Armed and yet gracious. Come, your captains wait !
I cannot help you, for to-day my brain
Lies in my skull as an impediment
To speech and effort (*Clasping his brow in horror at the Emperor's heedlessness*) Otho !

(*The Emperor breaks from Gerbert's detention, and springs towards Stephania, as if he suddenly recognised her*)

Otho What, my love,
Parted one moment from you, must religion
Already come betwixt us ? See, a crown !
We will have truth now, utter truth, the wisdom
That is life's sunken gold. If I am Cæsar—
And now I know I am ; as in a glory
I watch the multitudes that forge me arms,
The seas that make smooth pavement for my ships,
My laden dromedaries on the plains
Of sand—the wonder of it springs from this
Strange lady that I worship. Since my title
Is stablished, since I sit on Charlemagne's throne,
I need not trouble what my subjects say,
What cause they have against me, what revolt
They nourish in their blood ; they are no kindred
Of mine, but strangers, enemies I sought
To love against all nature : yet this day
I will not let them spoil, this yellow day
Of sun, and knowledge of my happiness ;
For, Gerbert, I have found my race. The light

Stephania

Strikes through me, as the vivid rain descended,
They tell, within a virgin's tower, and made
Disclosure of the mysteries she felt
Persuading her to joy: even so, ah so,
This splendid sun reveals to me my birth,
That I am Greek—I who have never known
Until to-day what sweet immunities
Such origin accords, what joy, what freedom,
That blended are serenitude. The large,
Harmonious earth receives me, and the cloister
Gapes like an empty grave upon the rim
Of shifting fascination. Joyous forms
Rejoice I should behold them as they sweep
Along in dances, coloured lustily,
With succulent, round arms that flash with action,
When steps are lifted as the cymbals meet,
And pleasure is conferred.

Stephania You see his state,
And I your handmaid, subject to your will,
Have brought this thing to pass.

Otho When I awoke,
I seemed to lie within a sunny field;
My naked limbs were thrown upon the sod
To catch the sun, while everywhere around
Swept cornlands in a glitter, harvest-meadows
That stood unshorn.

Gerbert His touch is burning hot;
He does not know me.

Stephania

Otho As I turned I saw
A goddess, hidden by her crinkled hair,
And prostrate in her garment: then I slept
In stillness that was full of life, and woke
Once more to hear her in another room,
That I could reach by springing. It is strange!
I tell you what I saw, I am not mad;
I know you want me in your restlessness
To speak to fancied rebels, and I know
Stephania is my mistress. Listen, Gerbert,
I see so many things, and yet not once
Have I beheld Crescentius, and no line
Of Romuald's face has mingled with the curves
Of land or of soft bodies that enchant.
So all is well.

(*He sinks down on the cushions of a seat; Stephania stands behind and above him. She addresses Gerbert*)

Stephania I was Crescentius' wife.
I would not have him (*Pointing to Otho*) haunted by my dead.
Not unavenged shall he again inflict
Dishonour on my husband. Is it well?

Gerbert (To Otho) Ay, well that Rome should find
you thus, who are
Co-equal in my dignity?

Stephania (To Gerbert) You stand
Superior? At my foot one victim lies
Prostrate, the other in a living mesh
Strives, he can never extricate.

Stephania

Otho (To Stephania) How sad
And grave you look ! Come, lift me in your arms,
My love ; I hate this sadness. Get away,
Old man, and set in awe the restive Church.
Your dreams are full of childishness ; I need
No dreams now I enjoy. Let us alone ;
We are so happy. Men have never set
An hour-glass in a room where there is mirth,
Music, and revelling. Your glances seem
So full of time, of summons, reprimand,
Reproach, dissuasion.

(*Leaning back on Stephania's bosom*) This I think must be
The Angel swearing time should be no more.
O Love,—but over me such wonders sweep,
Almost hallucination.

Gerbert It was thought
A while ago that soon I should be blind :
You prayed for me—Oh, when God answers prayer
It is to punish. Would you had been damned
The way you chose !

Stephania (Looking up) What is there to regret ?
The boy dies happy.

Gerbert Is he then to die
Dishonoured on your bosom ? What of that—
The church, the future ! I remain a Pope ;
Within me there are perfect powers of rule :
God helping me. . . . Why should God give me
help ?

Stephania

He hates, the devil hates me, and the two
Toss me as infamous from hand to hand.

(*To Otho*) 'Tis pity that you were not made a monk
To live in lewdness, safe from sound of war.
I thought once we should cleanse the monasteries,
I thought—but now I must go forth and watch
Your ungirt soldiers open to the foe. (*Moving away*)

Otho (*Springing after him*) Gerbert, come back, come
back. O my beloved,
What is this evil thing? (*Detaining him*)
How cold you stand

Across the sun, like stone!

Gerbert (*Stooping down—in a hurried whisper*) Bid her
depart.

I knew the words so well—anathema—
That day the great archheretic was stripped.

(*Softly stroking Otho*) Curse her, breathe on her, breathe!

Stephania I shall remain,
The execrated harlot.

Otho Peace!—O shame,
O misery! You brave him in my sight.
Do you not see that he is dying? Go!
Frown not thus stubbornly.

Gerbert (*With firmer voice*) Breathe on her, breathe!
The wanton!

Stephania I have never blenched from truth,
Truth cannot curse me.

Otho (*To Stephania*) Would you trouble him,

Stephania

An old, vexed, thwarted man. God's curse on you,
Begone!

Stephania But if you summon me again
I will return.

(*To Gerbert*) Old Pope, the prostitute
Is mistress of the palace. You grow dumb,
Are cut from argument. In penitence,
By prayer and such poor signs as you can make,
You shall restore me to my sovereignty.

Gerbert Breathe on her, breathe!

(*Exit Stephania*)

Otho O Gerbert, I am faint,
And you misjudge her. Lay me on the couch.
What is her sin? I dare not be alone
Without her. Are you come as Romuald came
To tell me I am damned—I had forgotten;
And if you think me dying I had liefer
Lie on her bosom than against your head.
Why did you bid her go, when there is nothing
Of interest to impart to me? I know
Your story bit by bit; while all is new
She says to me, all new and wonderful,
With little speech in it, a mystery
That soothes me as it opens. Call her back!

Gerbert At least come forth in armour.

Otho It is vain.
More visions crowd upon me; let me be.

Gerbert And let the people press into your palace,

Stephania

And hang your body on Saint-Angelo ?

Otho So, as I hanged Crescentius. Do you dream
That anything will goad me any more ?
But I am thirsty, and there is no drink
Left in my room. You cannot wait on me,
And I am sick to death.

(*Caressingly*) Will you not call
Stephania ? Do not vex me with report
Of these rebellions ; go and hush the noise.
Now call her to me !—Tell her how I hate
Her people, hate the multitude of slaves !
And I had led their legions far beyond
The habitable lands, the furrowed main,
The hot trench of the desert ; Lombardy
And Greece had been mere subject provinces.
I find corruption in my very dreams,
They crumble at a touch : I have foregone
All honour and all hope. I cannot reach
The East, I cannot reach the Holy Tomb ;
It were a drunken insolence to think
Again of that great enterprise. Last night
I seemed to lie within the Soldan's tent,
Silken and chequered, half in cramoisie,
And half in green and gold ; the balsam-hedge
Was fragrant round me, and I knew at heart
I was a cursèd Paynim. . . . Is she here ?
(*In an almost extinct voice*) Go, summon her—you
stumble at her name,

Stephania

Stephania?—for you know that I am sworn
To the sweet service of the devil. Haste,
Fetch me some help.

Gerbert God, I must start alone,
And face them and make signs. I will appease
Their treason in some manner, and return
To comfort you. O Otho, my beloved
(*Otho falls prone on a couch. Gerbert goes out, and his voice is heard in a hollow cry*)

Stephania, come!

(*She re-enters with a straw-laced wine-bottle from which she gives Otho drink*)

Stephania My lord, what illness clouds
The northern eagle's eyes? Doth Italy
Consume you with her fever?

Otho Fatal love,
Your face has laid me waste, you are so lovely,
So insupportable. Your kiss!—your kiss
Hurts as once conscience hurt me, and your eyes
Draw glory forth of me and leave but shame,
As in the summer every stream is dry
In this south country. O be pitiful,
If you conceive your loveliness!

Stephania You ask
Of me compassion?

Otho As I ask my Greece
To pity me, born northern, as I pray
Your cruel sun to spare me, as I turn

Stephania

To those great hopes and passions of my youth
That never will come down from their high seat,
As once I called for mercy on my God.

Stephania Hush, hush!—You have possessed me.

Otho Never speak

Such blasphemy again. I can possess
Nothing I love: the empire that I wield
Reaches my hand from others, and by others
In turn will be enjoyed when I am dead.
Stephania, O bright jewel, I am fading;
Our ways have almost parted: all my powers
Are growing older 'neath my yellow hair
Than if my head were grey. You must not smile;
There are strange terrors in me, strange revolts
Of youth against itself, and avenues,
That end in darkness of unstable depth,
I come on when I think.

Stephania Yet at a word
From Gerbert you dismissed me with a curse;
You had been very humble at my feet,
As now, an hour before; but when he came
I was a thing to taunt, to set at nought,
And put away. Recall the memories
I come from, what a past is in my blood:
I have endured base handling, but from you
I will demand humiliation such
As kings take from their prostrate enemies,
Ere you again shall move me to receive

Stephania

Your homage, or give favour to your love.

Otho But I am ill ; you must not speak to me
Of love or passion.

Bid the Romans come !

Do not block up the doors, I need the air.
O Italy, besieged about my heart,
I yield and make no terms ! There is a noise,
A pressure in the streets. Is Gerbert safe ?
It may be I imperilled him.

Stephania (Looking out) He comes
As one that hath been baulked ; derisively
The people eye him as he moves, his mien
Hath nothing of success.

Otho He is not hurt ?

Stephania Nay, nay ; he holds himself erect as if
With power to imprecate. Before he come,
I tell you, you must choose betwixt us twain :
Either dismiss him, or a second time
Look in my eyes forbiddingly. I scarce
Conceive a Pope is necessary now,
Seeing that you are damned—you told me that,
And then I bade you take the pleasant way
Of going to your doom ; in my compassion
I offered you my beauty to caress.
This Pope intruded ; he has spoken words
A woman may not hear ; he is my rival,
A bleached, old hypocrite ! (She unveils her dazzling
breast with a scornful laugh)

Stephania

Otho Beloved !

Stephania That name

You use to him ; and since he has your heart
I will not linger.

Otho (Rising with a cry) In your eyes is love
At last—oh, if you love me I shall live !
These jealous flames are hot, unlike the glances
That flowed as radiance out of ice or facet
Of diamond when you took me to yourself.
My Empress !

Stephania Will you never any more
Give Gerbert place ?

Otho Nay, let him find us now
Thus royal, thus enclasped. We will receive him,
And tell him of our pleasure as two kings.
You shall be crowned ; I need no diadem
Who have been blessed with oil. Mount, mount my throne,
And sit above me queenly !

*(In a scared voice, after he has yielded to her all his state,
and thrown himself at her feet)*

As I kneel,

I see you motionless 'mid wakeful gems
That nod and comment ; yet it cannot be
That you are Charlemagne's self, for where his beard
Fell down as cobweb is a rounded chin—
How firm in contour !—where the injured dust
Of eyelids marred his face, beam heavenly eyes
In which are juvenescence and delight.

Stephania

Your chair is golden-moulded ; his was made
Of spectral marble, bound with iron clamps ;
I never looked on anything so cold,
So of the grave, and kingdom of the dead ;
Its back and flanks were toneless, and its steps
For pressure of still feet—its charnel-steps,
Old, loosening, full of atoms. Many a night
I have gone down them one by one, until
I lost them in the softness of a gulf,
And strove to shudder. O Stephania, sit
Thus firm above me, living, eloquent
To every sense, lest that dead Emperor rise
Behind you, looming like a misty pile.
I took from him this carcanet ; from you
I snatch your chain—a pledge that I shall live
Lord of the realm you govern : his was pain
And yours is pleasure.

*(He takes from her the golden amulet that a while before
he had given her from the midst of the
dedicated treasure)*

Stephania But an absolute
Supremacy ?

Otho Beside you is a wreath
Of twisted grape and rose ; it shall not fade
Till it be token of my joyfulness. *(Crowning himself
with leaves and flowers)*

Love, here is wine ; drink, drink ! I did not dream
You could be jealous. Put away this state !

Stephania

We will carouse together. Did you languish
Dull months around the palace? I will live
To see you witness the great spectacles
In the arena; you shall wear my crown;
But all its angry cusps and notches must
Be blunted by fresh leaves; and we will listen
To music—there is spirit in its sounds
That makes all free within: we will not dance
As courtiers do, but spring extravagant
As Bacchanals, the impulse unallayed
By any circumspection; we will laugh
For hours with open lips. Your hands are cold;
Are you not happy yet? If that grim Pope—
Ah, ah, behold him, sanctimonious, slow,
And wry of face! Now you shall see me choose;
Embrace me, cling about me.

(*Re-enter Gerbert*) Excellent!

O Gerbert, you look grave. So conjurors look
When one who has admired their arts laughs out,
For he has learnt the method of their skill,
Can mix the magic and enchant the world.
I thought I wanted God; I was not happy,
Not for a single day; they never are
Who think of God. You bade me be like Him,
But I have learned that He has missed the mark,
And is most wretched, as a governor
Stemmed by His people's hate, and full of plans,
Striving for others. I will be myself,

Stephania

And use my good and live deliciously.
How tired you look! That comes of taking vows;
But when one has a paramour, one breathes
Her sweetness as one breathes the Maytide air
Without misgiving, confident of June
Beyond, and more, more summer.

(*Seizing Stephania's hand, and with her descending the steps of the throne*)

We defy

Your curses! Oh, I think that Paradise
Was entered underneath the flaming sword,
When those God punished put away the thought
Of pleasing Him, and in each other's arms
Found they were lapped in pleasure.

(*To Stephania*) He is dull;

Your beauty has transfix'd him.

(*During this speech GERBERT stands with folded arms following OTHO's movements, as one under operation follows the doctor's hand*)

Stephania Guiltiness

Keeps him at pause, my lord. Look on him, look!
Is he not withered of his own malign
And rancorous nature?

(*To Gerbert*) You would thrust me forth;
But I will keep my sovereign place until
You have declared my crimes. Your accusation!
We will be patient. Have I ever wronged
My country, have I ever wronged your friend?

Stephania

(*To Otho*) Give me my mantle. (*She sweeps the coronation mantle round her*) He collects his thoughts.

Why this is tedious: all his answers rise
And fall upon his brain and disappear,
As waves that heave and die and are not heard.
My gracious Emperor, must we not conclude
That I am guiltless since he has no speech.
At such an age paralysis will come
To men, like ice, close up their faculties,
Thicken their apprehension. He has drunk
But once of my elixir, and one draught
Hath not perchance sufficient energy
To thaw the sullen freezing of disease;
And yet I must interrogate.

(*To Gerbert*) If now
You can deny, if you dare give a sign,
Or make a movement of denial 'gainst
The questions that I put, I will retire.

(*To Otho*) Let me have justice.

(*To Gerbert*) Were you slow to mark
My beauty, were you slow to counsel me
To use it with a woman's guilefulness?
You give no signal of dissent, and therefore
I may affirm unquestioned—narrative
Is easy where none dares to contradict.
You eagerly besought me by all arts
To disenchant the Emperor of the cowl;
Yea, hinted it were better I should be

Stephania

His mistress, more acceptable to heaven,
Than that his youth should pass in sterile prayers.
You owned in Romuald an arch-enemy
We must combine to crush. I played my part ;
It was well conned, not new, and I attempted
In nothing to deceive. He took the harlot,
He laughed at Romuald. Is it for this triumph
That I must suffer?

Otho (Who has risen with a blaze of passion in his eyes) She shall slowly burn,
Burn in the fire, if she have injured you.

(To Stephania) Stand off!

Stephania He winked at my ascendancy,
He thought all influence lawful to exert
Against the hated Romuald and his God.
We have each hated well the cenobite,
And I have overcome him.

Otho Strategy!

(Gazing full at Stephania) Ah, I forget, it is your
natural part—
Lies, Lies! But, Gerbert, if this come from you,
There is a word that I can brand you with,
A novel signature, for you are fresh
To infamy: if, when I call you traitor,
You bow and tremble, if you dare not stand
Erect, and throw the charge back with your eyes,
If all you did to me was done in love,
I will be gentle. Do not let my passion

Stephania

Hold you back stunned from speech ; give me a sign.
There is a dreamy dulness in your face
As you too were past feeling. I can bear
So much if I have power to punish you,
If I can make you suffer. Do not stoop,
And stare upon the ground.

Stephania He seeks the parchment
You tore to pieces.

Otho Look ! he takes it up,
And kisses it, and tries to make it whole.
It is all lying plain before me now,
The letters are in order.

(He bends low down over the scroll ; GERBERT extends his hand at a distance over his head, and goes out noiselessly)

But they burn
As letters branded on a miscreant's cheek,
And they are written larger than before,
They change and move so that they have no form ;
I cannot read them—*(Looking up)* Is he gone away ?—
And then the figures move along so fast,
And falter from their purpose. All I know
I think he taught me. And that dreary book
On Reason that he wrote to clear my brain !
How odd it seems to think I am his dupe,
That he was bent on damning me the while
He wrote such precepts.

(To Stephania) Do you stand and watch

Stephania

With those red, filmy eyes? Go, fetch your Romans,
Fling back the doors, and let the rebels press,
Press on me dying: there should be spectators
To such a scene as this. Do as I bid;
You have been wont to execute the will
Of any soldier. Leave me to myself.

(*Exit STEPHANIA to the loggia, from which she looks out on the city. OTHO sinks exhausted on the couch.*)

How like a cell it is now she is gone,
And all the hills lie quiet! Mountain air,
Or else one could not breathe so easily;
And Romuald in his hut is saying prayers:
I watch the pigeons tumble in the sun,
The gold and silver feathers—Oh, this sleep!

(*He drops into a child-like slumber*)

Stephania (*Re-entering from the loggia*) Not yet!
Bavaria beats my people back;
Their triumph is delayed; (*Sitting down by OTHO*) but
here is death

Already at the gates. How beautiful
The full arch of these eyelids, the white forehead
So low and lustrous; but the mouth is swoln
Even now a little, just one purple spot.

Otho (*Half-waking*) Is it not almost noon tide? But I feel
It is—Rome's full meridian.

Stephania Do you ask?

Otho They say in Lapland there is one long night
Of winter, with no check. Close up the blinds!

Stephania

There is a twitching ray that flits about,
And dances on my brain. It is not sleep
To lie and watch the darkness rolling in:
I pass on to far shores, I am a stranger,
And all the sounds I hear are indistinct.

(While Otho is lying with closed eyes, Stephania rises; she stretches out her arms wearily, and disarranges the folds of her tunic. Stooping to put them straight, she looks at herself in Otho's shield, that still lies against the column where he threw it; then she turns from her reflection with disgust)

Stephania O God, how tedious is the harlot's part,
The mimic vanity, the mimic rage,
The waiting upon appetite ! I loathe
My gems, my unguents, all the fragrant lights
I scatter on my hair. To dress for him,
To garnish infamy, to give one's face
The vermeil of a flower ! I have such need
Of rest, to lay the cerecloth over him !
A lethargy falls on me like a hell
Pressed inward—ah, I have such need of sleep,
The change, the peace !

What, do the roses drop
Their leaves down on him ? Then his hour is come !
I may unmask.

(The roses from the garland about her crown shed themselves; she smiles, she shakes them down, then slowly strips herself of ear-rings, amulets, and golden girdle.

Stephania

*Last of all she lays aside her richly-broidered dress,
beneath which she wears a shroud)*

How fair and white the linen

They wrap about a corpse ! I clad myself
Thus secretly in grave-clothes every time
That I put on the harlot's ornaments,
The perfumes, and far-striking gems. At last
I can put by my marks of infamy,
All—save these branded cheeks, and give him sight
Of his denuded bedfellow. O death,
How dear are thy impoverishments, how dear
Thy nakedness and thy simplicity !

(She stands rigidly by Otho)

No need now of a censer ; in my will
The sorcery, the charm.

Otho Let be ! Let be !
I feel that I am dying ; every fear
Or trouble that has ever filled my mind
Is in my body, in my very blood,
Is massed upon my heart : it must be death.

Stephania It is.

Otho *(Unclosing his eyes)* Stephania—God, how terrible !

Stephania To die ?

Otho No, no ! How terrible your face,
That glitters white, ironic, and but now
Was marvellously beautiful. Your voice
Is just what I remember it, all else
About you altered : you are unadorned.

Stephania

I felt your stones like drops of northern rain
Against my brow and neck before I slept.
Where are they gone? Your robe of flattened folds
Perplexes while it seems to threaten me,
As clothing in a dream. I am beset
By what is unfamiliar. Speak!

Stephania You fancied

A woman had so little steadfastness
She could not mourn the husband of her youth,
So little chastity that she could give
His veritable pleasures ^{unto} you
Who falsely murdered him before her eyes,
And cast his honour to her ravishers.
She gave you bliss, but such as does not find
A perpetuity of life, a fence
Against destruction, that in essence is
Nothing, that passes on the blast of death
Into a void.

Otho I cannot understand

What you have been nor what I am become.
There is such crash of falling in my brain,
The world, myself, and all I built on you
Are broken into dust.

Stephania I have been pleasure;

I am as surely death. Last night you breathed
The subtle poison of slow-growing herbs
That lingers in its tacit balefulness
As if it loved to kill. You have few hours

Stephania

Of life beneath your sentence: then you die
Of me and by me, who deceived you not,
In whom you were deceived.

Otho So that I told you

The secret I have left before God's sight
In silence—how my poignant, wanton love
Sought help from the entireness that it trusted
To find in yours: and all the while your heart
Was stopped against me, and you understood
Nothing I suffered, but with smiles prepared
My punishment, my grave.

Stephania I never spoke
The least untruth to you, and at your prayer
Alone I have embraced you with a passion
Retributive, conjuring.

Otho From your eyes

I catch the frenzy of an awful gulf
That draws me down more than the streaming sense
Of night, the vast constriction that I know
Will bring me to the tomb. There is no love,
Not any in your face—there never was—
Nor in your kisses. I deceived myself
Each time I clasped your hand; you break but faith
With my delusion. O the bitterness,
Beyond the pains of death, the pains of fire!
You seemed to give that soon you might exact;
So different from Romuald, who denounced
The moment that he doomed, whose condemnation

Stephania

Exceeded yours in harshness, and yet brought
My will into its fold, whose prophecy
Remains amid the shadows of to-day
The only thing that lives—except a hope
That, if I bear with joy the uttermost
And everlasting justice of my God,
I sometime may behold upon His face
The love with which His saint looked after me
Who knew how I was judged. If it be true
I have some hours of breath, I yet may travel
To my great lover, and declare to him
My willingness to die and be condemned
As my divinest end.

My God, my God,
I must be cut away from Thee, except
Thy justice come to claim my wickedness
As portion of its rule, except Thy mercy
Stoop down to give me punishment as alms.

Stephania Have you forgotten whom you leave
behind,
And to what fate? The Pope is like to live
For many months.

Otho Dead, dead, but he is dead,
And out of mind for ever, dead and false.
Put him within the whitened sepulchre,
Write how he tore away my soul from truth,
Keeping back half he had to give of God—
Unpardonable sin! With perfect hatred

Stephania

I hate him, let him perish! I am girt,
And for a journey.

Stephania Is there any goal,
Or any welcome for you anywhere
But on my bosom?

Otho If it must be so—(*He falls back despairingly*)

Stephania Were it not better you should grow a child
Beneath my hand, and own that you are lost,
That you are lost to honour, without God,
Or fame, or increase of prosperity?

Otho And yet we soon shall part; you break the
fetters,
Giving me death.

I could be critical
Of these grey brows, so wan you look, so old;
There is so much in you of yesterday,
And nothing of forever. And this paint—
How coarse and foolish! I have been beguiled,
Mocked as great Ajax. Somewhere in the sun
At last he turned and offered sacrifice.

Stephania (*Breaking from the Emperor*) I cannot hurt
him, who have made myself
A harlot to secure his infamy,
To stamp him for perdition: I am wronged.

(*She walks to the crucifix, dashes it to the earth, and
stands on the base of the altar*)

O Voice, O Vision, smoky Covenant
In the horror of great darkness, I appeal

Stephania

To Thee, keep faith! By each unbroken pledge
Of Thine—the rainbow arches, and the sea
Held chafing in Thy curb, by night and day,
And by the still recurrence of the stars—
I make complaint. If retribution fail,
Then must Thy fair works perish, for Thou art
Of no immortal mould.

*(She comes down from the altar and advances towards
OTHO)*

I have been slow
The way of nature; as the gathering storm
I have been patient.

(To OTHO) Is it not too late
To think of penitence, to think of lying
Royal and vanquished at the feet of God?
Are you not wrecked and damned? For you the devils,
For you—not even the wanton I became,
But womankind forbidden, and the thirst,
Hunger and thirst of lust unquenchable.
This is your portion, and no dreamy hell.
Wake, know yourself!

Otho It is too late for dreams:
I have no hope to travel toward the feast,
The Bridegroom's voice; I do not knock or plead;
I shall have no possession, but desire
That will grow old and weary not. The joy
Is in the summons, not the destiny;
God calls me, not the devils, to His fire;

Stephania

And though I burn amid blaspheming jeers
There will be no more pain.

(*Raising himself*) If I had strength,
Since God has willed it, to abandon Rome,
And forth into the country! . . . Those blue flowers
At bottom of the hillside, cool and blue,
And the great, rugged hand to sprinkle me
With ashes—I can see it to the end.

(*He bows and prays*)

Stephania How he has passed beyond me! I retain
No terror for him while these hateful clothes
Make havoc of my beauty. I have lost,
O fool, my virtue, my reality.

(*She tears the shroud from her breast and pulls down her hair from the flat folds of her white hood*)

Otho (*Quietly uncovering his face*) No more renunciation, failure, task
Impossible, or deep, withdrawn delight
In all the future—nothing more to dread;
For, if it may not be I shall attain,
I can set forth.

(*He lifts himself firmly from the couch*)

Stephania You do not say farewell.

Otho I had forgotten you. How lone you stand
And beautiful. Have you untressed your hair
To shear it for some sacrifice? A pagan,
A temptress! O Stephania, on your bosom
My life has gone to ruins in its youth:

Stephania

I was so sad, and I so dreamt of love.
But you have had your hour. I will not leave you
With any poor reproach upon my lips
That have received your bounty, any rancour
In looks that drained the golden light of yours,
And now must perish darkling: all my senses
Reach after you with homage, and though dim
And shattered by your poison find in loss
Of you their endless death. To say farewell
Is once again to strain you in my arms,
To kiss you with one kiss till I am mad. . . .

(As he comes to her, he draws himself back suddenly with a loud cry)

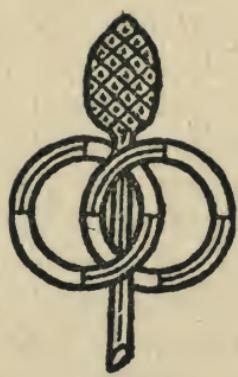
My God, have mercy and deliver me !

(He covers his eyes, trembling; with a fearful effort he passes out by the door; his footfall is heard, and the low, harsh noise of a sob. Then the steps grow distant)

Stephania Rome's hills rise sevenfold as deadly plagues
To compass those who trample and pollute,
Who dream they can possess her. He is gone,
Great Consul, and once more I am thy wife.
Myself hath cleansed myself: so whole my love
That I can turn the wicked into hell
As unperturbed as God. My chastity
Hath never broken ice through all the lust
And fervour of temptation. . . . He has reached
The gates ere now; my Rome is rid of him,

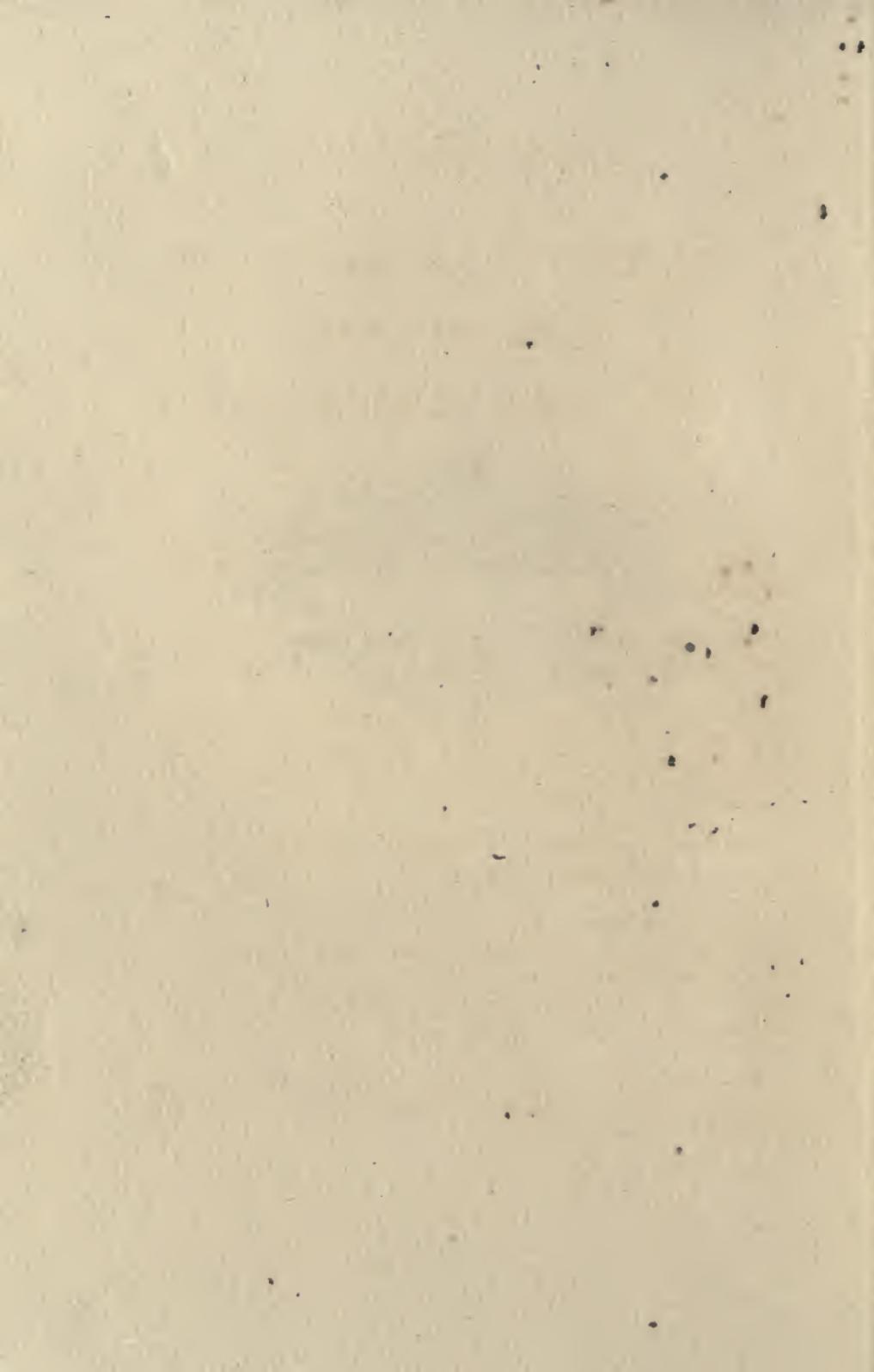
Stephania

Is rid of the usurper, and again,
Crescentius, I put on thy marriage-ring.
We will be sculptured on a monument
Together, side by side, and hand in hand,
As any mortal pair that had their part
Of joy and sorrow and then sank in death—
The wife, the husband ! Though thou hast no tomb,
My Consul, though thine ashes are dispersed
As dust about the Roman streets, to-night
I will sit down before Saint-Angelo,
Where I have sat so long beside thy corpse,
And while the earth goes her accustomed way,
And while the sun, far on his solemn round,
Is casting the same shadows on the roofs,
The same shade on the dial, bow my heart
In awe of the great triumph I have won
For Italy, my womanhood, and thee.





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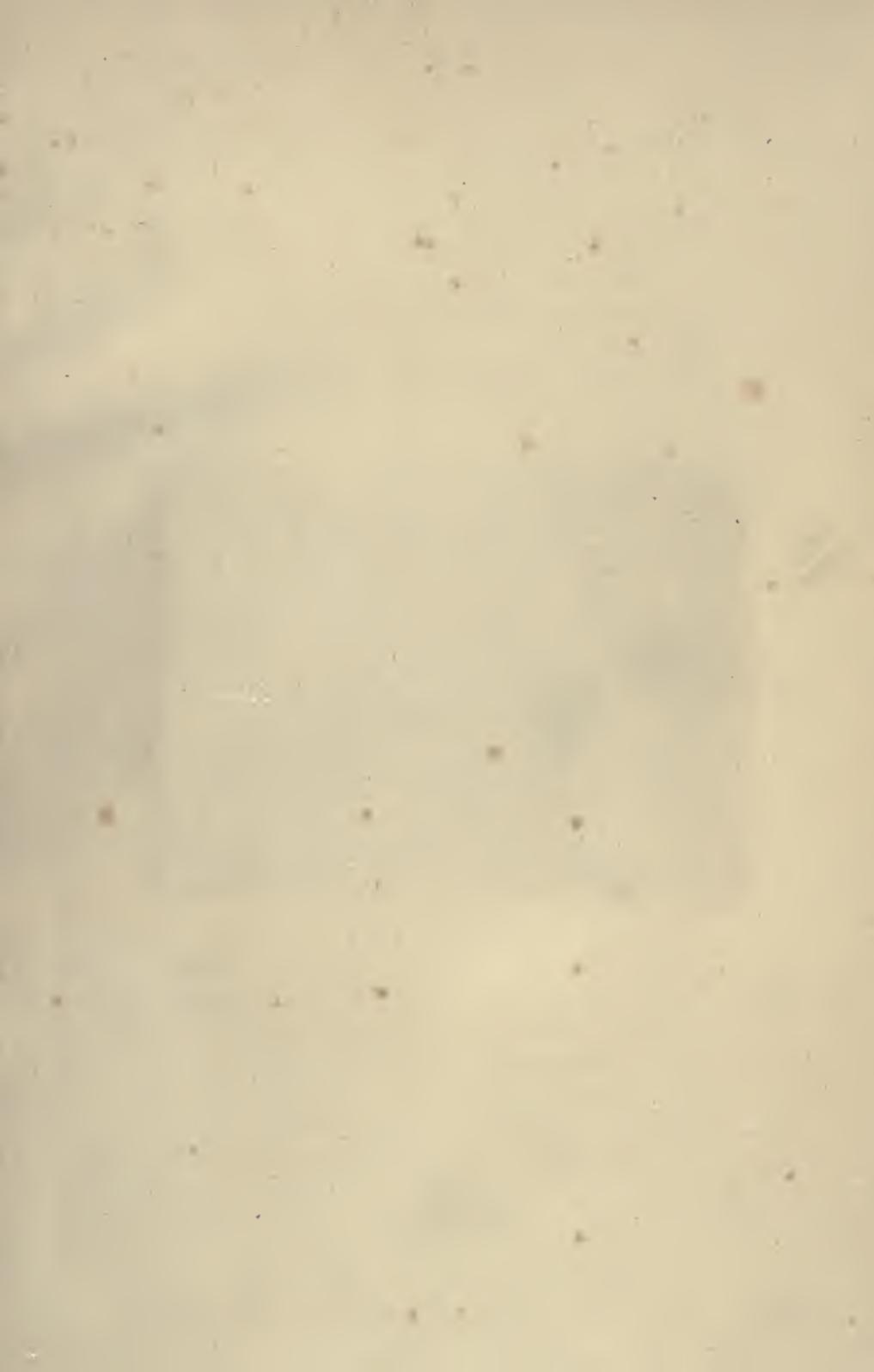
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